

THE LOGICAL PRIORITY OF REGENERATION TO SAVING FAITH IN A THEOLOGICAL *ORDO SALUTIS*

by
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The discussion of the logical relationship between regeneration and saving faith within a theological *ordo salutis* is no novel endeavor. Debate of this topic has abounded for over a millennium,² and possibly even from the days of the apostles themselves. Prominent surges of debate occurred between Augustine and Pelagius, between Luther and the Roman Catholic Church, and, with the emergence of the three traditions of the Protestant Reformation, between Lutherans, Calvinists, and Arminian Remonstrants.

In the latter half of the eighteenth century, Archibald McLean, John Glas, and Robert Sandeman developed a “Sandemanian” *ordo* within a broadly Reformed tradition. Sandemanianism inserted saving faith (defined as bare assent to the facts of salvation) before regeneration, but anticipated a fuller expression of faith after regeneration. This idea countered the Reformed *ordo salutis* that had historically united in placing regeneration prior to saving faith.³ After Andrew Fuller

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²Admittedly, the Latin phrase itself did not find usage until 1737 (*Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Order of Salvation,” by G. N. M. Collins, p. 869 [hereafter cited as *EDT*]), but, as Collins continues, “the doctrine is of much greater antiquity.”

³Calvinists prior to this time have limited discussions of their *ordo* because it had never been challenged from within, only from Romanists and later Arminians without. However, it is clear that they viewed the new birth as logically prior (see Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George M. Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., 3 vols. [Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1992–97], 15.4.12–13, 15.5.1–21; John Owen, *Biblical Theology* [reprint of 1661 ed., Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1994], pp. 603–4; John Gill, *A Body of Practical Divinity* [reprint of 1815 ed., Streamwood, IL: Primitive Baptist Library, 1977], pp. 380–87; A. A. Hodge, “A Practical View of Regeneration,” *Princeton Review* 8 [October 1836]: 483, 485, 490–91).

Some have appealed to Calvin himself as a proponent of faith preceding

powerfully rebutted Sandemanianism in his *Strictures on Sandemanianism*,⁴ it faded, together with all its other theological and political trappings and vitriol. Its basic soteriological precepts, however, survived.

During the nineteenth century a practical theology that emphasized the human role in the salvation process yet retained Calvinistic nomenclature⁵ emerged. Retaining the priority of divine activity in the salvation process yet also wishing to accommodate the human response-centered evangelistic practices of the day, this new soteriology synthesized elements of Taylorite⁶ Holiness and Calvinist Keswick soteriology, thus creating a “moderate Calvinism” that would allow the two traditions to merge.⁷

The quest for the theological legitimacy of this new system found its most successful expression in the theology of Dallas Theological

regeneration, which, on the surface, seems true. However, as will be seen below, Calvin’s definition of “regeneration” differed from the contemporary definition.

⁴Nottingham: C. Sutton, 1810.

⁵The term *Calvinist* conjures up different ideas for different readers. For the purposes of this article the term *Calvinist* specifically refers to the acceptance of individual, unconditional election, and the term *Arminian* to the denial of the same.

⁶By this term is meant the American branch of Arminianism aggressively propounded by Nathaniel Taylor (1786–1858) as “New School Presbyterianism,” then popularized through the teachings and evangelistic efforts of Asa Mahan and Charles Finney and perpetuated in their school, Oberlin College (see *EDT* s.v. “Taylor, Nathaniel William,” by W. A. Hoffecker, p. 1168).

⁷In a sense “moderate Calvinism” is a poor choice of terms because it has multiple meanings. Many “three- or four-point” Calvinists adopt the term to distinguish themselves from “five-point” Calvinists. Others, like the Dallas school, use the relationship of regeneration and faith within the *ordo salutis* as the determining factor in defining “moderate” Calvinism (Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 8 vols. [Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948], 3:184–85; Robert Lightner, *Sin, the Savior, and Salvation* [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1991], pp. 111–12 with p. 154). Still others use the term with extraordinary broadness, including even practical Arminians under this umbrella (Norman Geisler, *Chosen but Free* [Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1999], chap. 7, esp. p. 116). However, no other label has emerged for the position here described, so this article will use the label as defined in this sub-section.

Some would no doubt prefer to see the term “Amyrldian” substituted in place of “moderate Calvinism” in this context (see *EDT*, s.v. “Amyrldianism,” by Bruce A. Demarest, pp. 53–54, for a brief but helpful discussion of this view). But for three reasons I have declined using this term: (1) very few moderate Calvinists have adopted this label; (2) not all Amyrldians fit squarely into the description here given—Amyrldianism carries other theological “baggage”; and (3) I am not convinced that Amyrldian soteriology is sufficiently distinct from Calvinism to necessitate the forfeiture of the label “Calvinist.”

Seminary and its early leaders.⁸ Seizing on several key passages that seem to place faith before regeneration, this “moderate Calvinist” position proposed an antecedent work of God⁹ that renders unbelievers capable of exercising faith that *leads to* regeneration. This idea found limited acceptance in the practice of both Reformed and dispensational churches, but especially in the latter.¹⁰

Despite the considerable acceptance this soteriological *ordo salutis* has enjoyed within dispensationalist fundamentalism, it has not become a key area of study within the movement. The few contemporary sources that do defend the moderate Calvinist *ordo* have done so largely from outside this tradition,¹¹ and the nature of these works have yielded a defense that is less than thorough and satisfying. Further, traditional Calvinists have regularly disdained the moderate Calvinist option and eschewed rebuttals of it.¹² The result is that a systematic

⁸Principally the founder, Lewis Sperry Chafer, who, before founding Dallas Seminary, attended Oberlin College and had an itinerant ministry as an evangelistic preacher and musician, most notably with D. L. Moody.

⁹Views on the particularity and efficacy of this antecedent work vary among proponents, though Chafer’s position clearly considered this gracious work as individual and efficacious, in contrast to the Arminian view (Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 3:210–17).

¹⁰Dispensationalism is not a monolithic theological system. Dispensationalism does not claim a peculiar expression of bibliology, theology proper, Christology, anthropology, hamartiology, or, despite objections to the contrary, soteriology: it shares these doctrines in common with other theological systems. However, Dallas Theological Seminary sought a dispensational “corner” on soteriology that won the day in many dispensational and fundamentalist circles. So successful were they in this effort that many critics and proponents of dispensationalism have erroneously assumed that the soteriology espoused by the early Dallas school is essential to dispensationalism. See, for instance David R. Anderson’s explicit agreement with R. C. Sproul in his statement, “Regeneration is one of the crux interpretations which distinguishes Reformed theology from Dispensational theology” (“Regeneration: A *Crux Interpretum*,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 13 [Autumn 2000]: 46–56). With this statement this author most heartily disagrees.

¹¹The most articulate include Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), pp. 941–59; Gordon R. Lewis & Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987–94), 3:73–107; and Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1997), pp. 178–91.

¹²Robert Reymond’s defense of the traditional Calvinist *ordo* (*A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* [Nashville: Nelson, 1998], pp. 708–10) is only two pages, as is Wayne Grudem’s (*Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994], pp. 702–4). Other defenses include C. Samuel Storms, *Chosen for Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), pp. 101–20; James R. White, *The Potter’s Freedom* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press, 2000), pp. 283–325. In addition to being brief, these treatments are usually designed to combat pure Arminianism, not the moderate Calvinism espoused by Erickson, Demarest, and the Dallas School. In his *Willing to Believe* (Grand Rapids:

analysis of both positions remains unwritten.

This article will examine several Scripture passages and theological constructs and analyze their implications in defending a theological *ordo salutis* that places regeneration logically prior to saving faith.

DEFINING TERMS

No work can be effective without agreement upon definitions of key terms. This is especially true in this study in which several essential theological terms enjoy a diversity of definitions. This section will identify the leading definitions offered and defend the most suitable against less suitable definitions.

Ordo Salutis

By *ordo salutis*, this article means the theological order of application of the various aspects of salvation to the individual. This does *not* mean that there is chronological order of application—many of the aspects are simultaneous.¹³ But there is a logical or causal priority. Faith and regeneration occur simultaneously, but they do not occur independently of or without any relation to one other. One logically effects the other.

Regeneration

John Calvin placed regeneration, at least in part, after saving faith. However, Calvin did not view regeneration as the initial impartation of spiritual life, but as the lifelong renewal of the believer—his progressive sanctification culminating in glorification.¹⁴ In this sense Calvin's

Baker, 1997), pp. 189–204, R. C. Sproul comes close when he engages the soteriology of Chafer, but he ultimately fails to identify what distinguishes Chafer soteriologically from an Arminian.

¹³This fact is admitted by all; in fact, in view of this detail, some have chosen to deny the existence of an *ordo salutis* in lieu of a “way of salvation” (esp. G. C. Berkouwer, *Faith and Justification*, trans. Lewis B. Smedes [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954], pp. 25–36; also Anthony Hoekema, *Saved by Grace* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989], pp. 14–17). However, even these speak of a “causal priority” (Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, pp. 14, 107) within the soteriological event.

The charge that the position defended in this article represents “pre-salvation regeneration” is unwarranted. Not only does this charge require a reductionist definition of “salvation” (i.e., salvation=fait), it also unfairly suggests a time lag between regeneration and faith that is denied by proponents of the priority of regeneration to faith. Any priority is logical, not chronological.

¹⁴John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 3.3.9; see also 3.11.6; 3.11.11.

“regeneration” followed faith and was, in his words, a lifetime “restoration” of “repentance,”¹⁵ the gradual conversion of the believer. This “extended sense”¹⁶ of regeneration was common among early theologians, and probably derives from seeing regeneration (παλιγγενεσία) in Titus 3:5 as a synonym of renewal (ἀνακαίνωσις) in the same verse, then defining the latter according to its usage elsewhere in Scripture as a synonym for sanctification (Rom 12:2; 2 Cor 4:16; Eph 4:22–25).¹⁷ This imprecise exegesis is typical of the early Reformation, where other debates took center stage. Francis Turretin, one of the first to recognize the problem, addressed it by differentiating between “habitual and passive conversion” which is “more properly called regeneration,” and “actual and active conversion” which is better called “conversion.”¹⁸ Over time the term was gradually refined “from a desire to protect the Reformed concept from misconception”¹⁹ to the more precise idea of the “starting point” in which “God plants the principle of a new spiritual life in [the] soul.”²⁰ Calvin and the other early Reformers recognized this “starting point,” but did not use the term regeneration to describe it.²¹

Since Scripture only once refers to individual salvation with the term “regeneration” (παλιγγενεσία—Titus 3:5), we must rely on synonyms of regeneration in the course of this study. Some of these include being “made alive”—συζωοποιέω (Eph 2:5; Col 2:13) “born”—γεννάω (John 1:13; 1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1), “born from above”—γεννάω ἄνωθεν (John 3:3, 7), or “born again”—ἀναγεννάω

¹⁵Ibid., 3.3.9.

¹⁶This term is taken from Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, trans. Henri De Vries (reprint of 1900 ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), p. 293.

¹⁷William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 2 vols. (New York: Scribner’s, 1888), 2:492–93.

¹⁸*Institutes*, 15.4.13. See also Berkouwer, *Faith and Justification*, pp. 29–30; Kuyper, *Work of the Holy Spirit*, pp. 293–98; and Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, trans. Henry Zylstra (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), pp. 401–402.

¹⁹Berkouwer, *Faith and Justification*, p. 30.

²⁰Kuyper, *Work of the Holy Spirit*, p. 293; Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (reprint of 1872 ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 3:5; John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit* (reprint of 1954 ed., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1965), p. 129.

²¹Calvin, for instance, mentions the “root of heavenly life” that precedes faith and repentance (*Institutes*, 3.1.2), and the “sudden conversion [that] subdued and brought my mind to a teachable frame” (preface to his *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 5 vols., trans. James Anderson [reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948], p. xl). For Calvin on regeneration and conversion, see Pete Wilcox, “Conversion in the Thought and Experience of John Calvin,” *Anvil* 14 (May 1997): 113–128.

(1 Pet 1:3, 23), having a “new heart”—לֵב חָדָשׁ (Ezek 18:31; 36:26) a “new spirit”—רוּחַ חֲדָשׁ (Ezek 11:19; 18:31; 36:26) a “heart of flesh”—לֵב בָּשָׂר (Ezek 11:19; 36:26) or a “circumcised heart” (Deut 10:16; 30:6; Jer 4:4; 9:25; Ezek 44:7, 9), and being a “new creation”—καὶ νῦν κτίσις (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15).²²

Calling regeneration the “starting point” of new spiritual life, however, is insufficient. A bigger concern is its form. Roman Catholics see water baptism as the starting point, “a beginning, a point of departure...wholly directed toward the acquiring of fullness of life in Christ.”²³ Arminians and Wesleyans view regeneration as the start of a new quality of life that blossoms from the faint stirrings of the life seed possessed universally.²⁴

Though the early Dallas Seminary leadership would have rejected this universally possessed “seed” of life, their idea of regeneration differs little from the Arminian/Wesleyan. John Walvoord, for instance, in describing efficacious grace—for him, a work distinct from and prior to regeneration—as the instantaneous passage of “the soul...from

²²Other proposed synonyms for regeneration are contested a bit more heavily, such as the “drawing” work of the Holy Spirit in John 6:44, the “opening of Lydia’s heart” in Acts 16:14, and the “pure lip” of Zeph 3:9. These descriptors, by virtue of their infrequent usage, are nearly impossible to define apart from the *analogia fidei*, that is, their meanings can be determined only after one’s theological position has been established. Still other proposed synonyms for regeneration will be examined and rejected as such in this article, most notably the predominant usage of “life” (the ζωή and חַיִּים word groups), and being “saved” (passive of σωζω).

²³“Decree on Ecumenism,” in par. 23 of *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott (New York: Guild Press, 1966), p. 364.

Protestant paedobaptism differs in that baptism *confers* no regeneration, but introduces the child to the covenant community and symbolizes the regeneration either already present or likely to occur by virtue of a child’s birth into a covenantal family. Again, such a child must later confirm his regeneration by “converting” (John Murray, *Christian Baptism* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1962], pp. 86–93; Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.16.17–20; Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 2:508, n. 1; *The Westminster Confession*, 28.1).

David Anderson goes so far as to assert that the Reformed *ordo* derives solely from Roman Catholic influence and that, were it not for the latent Catholicism still residing in Reformed theology, it would never have thus developed (“Regeneration: A *Crux Interpretum*,” pp. 46–56. See also Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 3:77; Demarest, *Cross and Salvation*, pp. 283–87).

²⁴A lucid explanation of the Wesleyan view is Scott Kisker’s “Justified but Unregenerate?” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 28 (Spring–Fall 1993): 44–58, esp. pp. 48–50. In it he cites Wesley: “a man may have a degree of justifying faith before he is wholly freed from all doubt and fear, and before he has (in the full proper sense) a new clean heart” (p. 48). In short, one may be (like the title of the article) “justified but unregenerate”—not because he has no life, but because he has not progressed in his sanctification to the “full proper sense” of a perfectly clean heart.

a state of spiritual death to spiritual life,"²⁵ cannot view regeneration as the absolute inception of life. Realizing this, Walvoord necessarily emphasizes the eternal *quality* of life at regeneration²⁶ rather than the initial impartation of life stressed in the Reformed view.²⁷

Chafer's definition of regeneration includes yet another element. For him regeneration is the starting point of *sonship*, "a creation by divine generation, a constituting of believers inherent, innate, legitimate sons of God....the immeasurable realities of an actual sonship relation to God, which makes the Christian an heir of God and a joint heir with Jesus Christ."²⁸ This definition rightly calls attention to the new creation, but concentrates on the rights associated with adoption, which are typically consequent to regeneration in a Reformed *ordo*. We will return to this discussion below.

A Reformed definition of regeneration is the decisive impartation of spiritual life to a spiritually dead man.²⁹ However, the Reformed idea of regeneration is not properly the animation of the old nature, but the provision of a new nature, that is, *a new complex of attributes, one of which is spiritual life*. In keeping with various terms used for regeneration in Scripture, and in the OT specifically—the "new heart" (Ezek 18:31; 36:26), the "new spirit" (Ezek 11:19; 18:31; 36:26), the "heart of flesh," (Ezek 11:19; 36:26) the "circumcised heart" (Deut 10:16; 30:6; Jer 4:4; 9:25; Ezek 44:7, 9), the "pure lip" (Zeph 3:9) or the "new creation" (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15)—regeneration is not merely the impartation of life, but, more broadly, *the decisive impartation of the new nature to a spiritually dead man*.³⁰ This is the definition this

²⁵ *Holy Spirit*, p. 122.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 131–32. Ironically, Walvoord's definitions of the efficacious call and regeneration overlap so thoroughly that one wonders whether there are actually *two* new births and *two* new natures provided—one at the efficacious call and a second at regeneration. This enigma will be discussed below.

²⁷ As Grudem notes, Scripture tends to emphasize the instantaneous initiation of life in its use of "regeneration" and its synonyms, not its eternal quality (*Systematic Theology*, p. 704). Likewise, as J. I. Packer notes, one of the two central emphases of the figure of new birth is its "decisiveness" (*EDT*, s.v. "Regeneration," p. 1000).

²⁸ *Systematic Theology*, 6:104; also his *Major Bible Themes* (Chicago: Bible Institute Colportage Association, 1927), pp. 85–86. (The 1974 Walvoord revision of this book [Zondervan] reflects Walvoord's position as opposed to Chafer's.)

²⁹ Turretin, *Institutes*, 15.4.12–13; Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3:5; Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 2:491–92; A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1907), pp. 809, 813; L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941), pp. 468–69; R. C. Sproul, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1992), pp. 171–72; Packer, "Regeneration," pp. 924–25; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 702; Reymond, *New Systematic Theology*, p. 720.

article will defend.

Saving Faith

The term *faith* scarcely needs defining. Nearly all evangelicals affirm that saving faith includes three elements: (1) intellectual knowledge of, (2) emotional assent to, and (3) unreserved, volitional trust in the accomplished redemptive work of Christ as revealed in the Scriptures.³¹ The noun form of faith (πίστις), like παλιγγενεσία, rarely appears in the disputed passages. So again, we rely upon the verb form (πιστεύω) and its synonyms³² and also upon various manifestations of saving faith, such as repentance (Acts 11:18) and the sanctified activities described especially in 1 John³³ but also elsewhere in Scripture.³⁴

Some personnel at Dallas Seminary have recently revived the Sandemanian view of faith that effectively denies the involvement of the will in faith.³⁵ One might at first dismiss this as an anomaly unrelated

³⁰Note all the discussions referenced in note 29 above and also A. A. Hodge, "A Practical View of Regeneration," *Princeton Review* 8 (October 1836): 477–500; B. B. Warfield, *Biblical and Theological Studies*, ed. Samuel G. Craig (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1968), pp. 351–74; Sproul, *Essential Truths*, pp. 171–72; Packer, "Regeneration," pp. 924–25.

Ironically, two visible proponents of the priority of faith to regeneration have definitions that closely resemble the Reformed view. Bruce Demarest formally defines regeneration as "that recreative act of the Holy Spirit graciously establishing the permanent propensity of a convert to become like Christ in fulfilling moral law and fellowshiping with the heavenly Father forever" (*Integrative Theology*, 3:107, also *Cross and Salvation*, p. 292). Millard Erickson's formal definition of regeneration is "God's transformation of individual believers, his giving a new spiritual vitality and direction to their lives when they accept Christ" (*Christian Theology*, p. 955). We might legitimately reduce Demarest's and Erickson's definitions as follows: regeneration is the impartation of the new nature *to the believer*. The difference (and a significant one) between their definitions and the Reformed definition is that Demarest and Erickson allow for the exercise of faith apart from the new nature.

³¹Strong (*Systematic Theology*, pp. 836–49) most closely represents the terminology used here, but these elements are common in nearly all evangelical definitions and explanations of faith apart from the Dallas school.

³²E.g., "fearing God" (Deut 5:29) and "knowing God" (Deut 29:4; Jer 24:7; 1 John 4:7).

³³E.g., practicing righteousness (2:29), eschewing sin (3:9), loving God (4:7).

³⁴E.g., calling on the Lord (Zeph 3:9), hearing and welcoming the Word (John 5:24–25; 1 Cor 2:14), keeping the Law (Jer 31:33), covenant obedience (Ezek 11:19–20; 36:26–27).

³⁵Especially Zane Hodges (*Absolutely Free!* [Dallas: Redención Viva, 1989], pp. 30–31) and his Grace Evangelical Society (see esp. Michael D. Makidon, "From Perth to Pennsylvania: The Legacy of Robert Sandeman," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 15 [Spring 2002]: 75–92), but also Charles Ryrie (*So Great Salvation*

to the present discussion; however, there may be a more significant connection. Since (1) the will acts in accordance with its nature (Matt 7:18; Jer 13:23), and (2) regeneration is not conferred until *after* the exercise of faith, it logically follows that “faith” may easily be reduced to intellectual assent. Acts involving the will (e.g., repentance, sanctification, perseverance, etc.) logically come later. Thus while this understanding of faith is erroneous and to be rejected, it is not surprising.

Antecedent Works of the Holy Spirit

All careful theologians, even Arminians, recognize the systemic depravity and inability of the natural man to do any good.³⁶ Yet all affirm the necessity of man to come to God in faith. To effect this faith, then, there must be some antecedent work of God that enables faith. The following section will outline three approaches to this enabling work.

Antecedent Grace as Prevenient Grace

Lexically speaking, all grace that precedes faith is “prevenient” in the non-technical sense of the term.³⁷ However, Arminian and Wesleyans use the phrase “prevenient grace” to apply specifically to a universal, non-regenerative, and non-efficacious work of God that restores the ability of all men to respond to God in faith.³⁸

Antecedent Grace as an Efficacious Call Distinct from Regeneration

Since he views faith as logically prior to regeneration but also denies a universal prevenient awakening, the moderate Calvinist is unwilling to accept prevenient grace as taught by the Arminian/Wesleyan. Thus Erickson, Demarest, Chafer, and much of

[Wheaton: Victor, 1989] pp. 30, 119–21) and Joseph Dillow (*The Reign of the Servant Kings* [Hayesville, NC: Schoettle Publishing Co., 1993], pp. 272–73).

³⁶Only a Pelagian would demur with this statement. Arminius strenuously denounced Pelagius on this point, calling him “heretical...diametrically opposed to the words of Christ...very destructive...and inflict[ing] a grievous wound” for maintaining innate ability within man (*The Writings of James Arminius*, trans. James Nichols and W. R. Bagnall, 3 vols. [reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977], 1:257).

³⁷In fact, in P. E. Hughes’s discussion of prevenient grace in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, he completely ignores the Arminian-Wesleyan concept, defining prevenient grace as simply “grace which comes first” (p. 520).

³⁸For a succinct discussion of the Wesleyan view of prevenient grace, see Leo G. Cox, “Prevenient Grace: A Wesleyan View,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 12 (Summer 1969): 143–49.

the Dallas school vigorously affirm an antecedent work of grace prior to the exercise of faith that, unlike the Arminian/Wesleyan versions, is both individual and efficacious.³⁹ Moderate Calvinists label this antecedent variously “illumination,”⁴⁰ the “convicting work of the Holy Spirit,”⁴¹ “efficacious grace,”⁴² the “special,” “effective,” or “effectual call,”⁴³ or “divine persuasion.”⁴⁴ Regardless of which label is used, all uniformly denote the Holy Spirit’s work on the mind of the *individual* unbeliever which *necessarily* results in faith unto regeneration.

Antecedent Grace as Regeneration

Augustus Hopkins Strong expressed the inability of man to effect regeneration with a parable by Plutarch of a man attempting to make a corpse stand upright. Upon failing, the man concluded, “*Deest aliquid intus*”—“There’s something lacking inside.”⁴⁵ Likewise, in Reformed thought, the only way a spiritual corpse could ever exercise faith is if a new, living nature and its attendant will displace the old, dead nature. As such, the only antecedent work of God that could result in the exercise of saving faith is regeneration itself.⁴⁶ John Murray comments:

God’s call, since it is effectual, carries with it the operative grace whereby the person called is enabled to answer the call and to embrace Jesus Christ as he is freely offered in the gospel. God’s grace reaches down to the lowest depths of our need and meets all the exigencies of the moral

³⁹See esp. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, p. 944.

⁴⁰Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 1:167–68; 3:47–48.

⁴¹Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 3:210–24; *Salvation*, p. 49.

⁴²Walvoord, *Holy Spirit*, pp. 119–27; Ryrie, *Holy Spirit*, pp. 85–88.

⁴³Erickson, *Christian Theology*, pp. 942–44; Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 3:104; Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Wheaton: Victor, 1982), p. 325; Robert A. Pyne, “The Role of the Holy Spirit in Conversion,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150 (April–June 1993): 211–18.

⁴⁴Anderson, “Regeneration: A *Crux Interpretum*,” p. 61; Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 1:168.

⁴⁵*Systematic Theology*, p. 813.

⁴⁶There is an intramural debate among Reformed theologians concerning the relationship between the effectual call and regeneration. For many the two terms are synonymous (e.g., *The Westminster Confession*, 10.1–2); for others, regeneration logically precedes the efficacious call (e.g., Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 471–72; Reymond, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 714–18); still others view the efficacious call as logically prior (e.g., Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, p. 86). In any case, there is unanimity that both regeneration and the efficacious call precede the exercise of saving faith.

and spiritual impossibility which inheres in our depravity and inability. And that grace is the grace of regeneration.⁴⁷

THE ARGUMENT THAT FAITH PRECEDES REGENERATION SUMMARIZED AND ANSWERED

The argument that faith precedes regeneration exists in three lines: the presences of (1) passages expressing faith or repentance unto salvation, (2) passages expressing belief and repentance unto life, and (3) passages expressing employment of the Word unto regeneration.

Passages Expressing Faith or Repentance unto Salvation

Acts 16:31—"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will *be saved*."⁴⁸

Romans 10:9—"If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and *believe* in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will *be saved*."

Romans 10:13 (cf. Acts 2:21)—"Whoever will *call* on the name of the Lord will *be saved*."

Ephesians 2:5, 8—"[God] made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in our transgressions (by grace you have been saved).... By grace you have *been saved* through *faith*."

2 Thessalonians 2:13—"From the beginning God has chosen you to *be saved* through sanctification by the Spirit and *faith* in the truth."

The various passages in this non-exhaustive list indicate that faith precedes *salvation*. Some have extrapolated that this is evidence that faith must also precede *regeneration*, since regeneration is a part of salvation. However, this conclusion is unwarranted for two reasons.

Time Factors

The fact that the verbs σωθήσῃ and σωθήσεται are cast in the future tense in Acts 2:21, 16:31, and Romans 10:9, 13 does not demand that they are cast in future *time*. It is plausible to identify the use of the future tense here as Stanley Porter's "timeless future,"⁴⁹ in which absolute time is undetermined, yielding only a vague association. Note

⁴⁷John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, p. 96.

⁴⁸Unless otherwise noted, all translations are the author's own.

⁴⁹*Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament with Reference to Tense and Mood* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), pp. 421–23.

for instance, one of Porter's examples: In Romans 6:5, 8 Paul indicates that we *shall be* in the likeness of his resurrection and *shall* live, even though context clearly indicates that we already *are* raised and *are* alive (vv. 4, 11). As Porter notes, the future tense does not indicate future time; rather, "the syntactical evidence can be used in fact to argue just the opposite, that Paul sees the 'resurrection' of the believer already present once he is 'planted' or 'dead' to Christ."⁵⁰ If this is the case in the passages in view in this study, then there is no temporal succession associated with the future "shall be saved" (σωθήσῃ).

On the other hand, "being saved" sometimes does have a temporal reference. On rare occasions salvation is viewed as a past event (Rom 4:24; 2 Tim 1:9; Titus 3:5). Far more regularly, however, temporally defined uses of σώω point forward to an eschatologically future salvation—the final rescue from the presence of sin and the penalty of death.⁵¹ This does not deny that salvation has a past or present aspect; instead, it affirms that the term regularly refers strictly to its eschatological culmination. In view of the prophetic roots of Romans 10 and Acts 2:21 (cf. Joel 2:32) this explanation is a more likely explanation for the use of the future tense in these two passages.⁵²

The Broad Meaning of "Being Saved"

If "being saved" (all five passages in view use the passive voice of σώω) is sometimes viewed as an eschatological event, it cannot be reduced to mean "being regenerated." Instead, the Scripture-writers seem to use the verb broadly, as a generic or "package" term. Sometimes the verb references the early phases of the soteriological process (John 10:9; Acts 16:31; Phil 2:12; Titus 3:5; etc.); sometimes its end in glorification (Matt 24:13; Mark 13:13; Rom 13:11; 1 Peter 1:5, 9; etc.); and still other times the entire salvation process (1 Cor 1:18; 2 Cor 2:15).⁵³ Thus it is impossible to find a consistent placement of

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 423; cf. Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 371.

⁵¹Matt 10:22; 24:13; Mark 13:13; Rom 5:9–10; 9:27; 11:26; 1 Cor 3:15; 2 Tim 4:18.

⁵²In fact, this is the majority view respecting Romans 10:9, 10. See C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans*, 2 vols., International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979), 2:530; C. K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), pp. 201–202; James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1988), p. 216; Thomas Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), p. 560.

⁵³The central idea of salvation in the NT is rescue and deliverance. When we are saved there is an immediate and permanent rescue from the power of sin. But ultimate deliverance from the presence of sin remains future. Even in the clearest references to

“salvation” in a biblical *ordo salutis*. For instance, while we find salvation “following” belief in the five passages above, we also find it “following” regeneration (Titus 3:5), justification (Rom 5:10), reconciliation (Rom 5:10), sanctification (2 Thess 2:13; possibly 1 Tim 2:15), perseverance in faith, doctrine, and good works to the end (Matt 10:22; 24:13; Mark 13:13; 1 Cor 15:1; 1 Pet 4:18), and the Bema Seat judgment (Mark 10:30 cf. 10:15; 1 Cor 3:15). It is obvious that these passages do not require that *regeneration* follow all or even any of these events. Thus, when we see faith “preceding” *salvation*, we cannot conclude therefrom that faith precedes *regeneration*.

This explanation, however, still leaves an obstacle which is expressed in the unspoken syllogism below:

A: Faith results in salvation broadly defined.

B: Regeneration is an aspect of salvation broadly defined.

∴ C: Faith results in regeneration.

The implication is that since “salvation” follows faith, *every aspect* of salvation must likewise follow faith. But this is theologically untenable. For instance, election does not follow faith; the efficacious call does not follow faith—and surely no one could deny that these are both aspects of salvation. There is no reason why regeneration cannot be listed with these. With this in mind it is easy to spot the failure of the syllogism above: it does not preclude the possibility that some aspects of salvation precede faith. It only states that many benefits of salvation are realized after one believes.

The close proximity of “being saved” with being “made alive” in Ephesians 2:5, 8 challenges this conclusion. But note the following. (1) The purpose of the parenthetical remark is to draw attention to the role of God in salvation, not to give a narrow meaning for salvation for

immediate salvation is an “already, not yet” dichotomy: we were saved, yet are not yet saved, so shall be saved. So thorough is the interchange that it is virtually impossible to single out immediate salvation when a word from the σωζω group is used and exclude from it the other aspects of salvation. This dichotomy is borne out by the lexicons (Walter Bauer, Frederick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed, revised and edited by Frederick W. Danker [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000], s.v. “σωζω,” pp. 798–99 [hereafter cited as BDAG]; *Evangelical Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. “σωζω,” by Walyer Radl, 3:320–21 [hereafter cited as EDNT]; *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, s.v. “Redemption,” by Colin Brown and Johannes Schneider, esp. 3:213–15 [hereafter cited as NIDNTT]). No lexicon casts “salvation” as an exact synonym for “regeneration.” Regeneration is a part of salvation, but not a synonym of salvation.

inclusion in an *ordo salutis*. (2) The commentaries unite in viewing “salvation” in both verses as a broad term, and not *limited to* regeneration.⁵⁴ The theme “by grace you have been saved” makes the point that God is the author of every aspect of salvation: *God* had love and mercy (v. 4); *God* regenerated (v. 5); *God* raised and seated us (v. 6); *God* gave us faith (v. 8); and we are *God’s* workmanship (v. 10). In summary, *God saved us* (vv. 5, 8).

To conclude, when faith “precedes” salvation in Scripture, there are options more defensible than the conclusion that faith precedes regeneration.

Passages Expressing Faith or Repentance unto Life

John 3:15–16—“Everyone who *believes* in me shall have eternal *life*.”

John 5:24–25—“he who *hears* my word, and *believes* him who sent me, has everlasting *life* and...has passed out of death into life.... The dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who *hear* will *live*.”

John 5:40—“You will not *come* to me in order to receive *life*.”

John 6:40—“...that all who *believe* in him may have *life*.”

John 11:25—“He that *believes* in me shall *live*.”

John 20:31—“By *believing* you may have *life* through his name.”

Acts 11:18—“God has granted the Gentiles the *repentance* that leads to *life*.”

1 Timothy 1:16—“...for those who would *believe* in Him for eternal *life*.”

It is impossible to deal with each of these texts individually, nor, in fact, is the list exhaustive. However, a detailed exegetical study for each is unnecessary for two reasons: (1) the “life” described in these verses is not a strict synonym for regeneration, and (2) the point of the passages

⁵⁴See Peter T. O’Brien’s comments on Eph 2: “The verb to ‘save’ includes God’s acts of making us alive, raising us up, and seating us with Christ.... The periphrastic perfect construction draws attention to the resulting state of salvation” (*The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999], p. 169). Ernest Best concurs, defining salvation here as “the state of salvation...; life will now be continuous” (*Ephesians*, International Critical Commentary [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998], p. 217; cf. also Homer A. Kent, Jr., *Ephesians*, Everyman’s Bible Commentary [Chicago: Moody Press, 1971], p. 37).

is not to announce logical priority within an *ordo salutis*.

The Definition of “Life”

Later in this article it will be demonstrated that the prevailing meaning of the OT חַי word group is “full” or “abundant” life, and that the inception of life is likely never intended by its various uses. The same cannot be said of the NT ζῶ word group: on several occasions the word group *does* denote the inception of spiritual life—regeneration.⁵⁵ In most cases, however, ζῶ and its cognates do *not* refer to the inception of life. Instead, we usually find vestiges of the OT idea of abundant life, the “whole package culminating in the *glory*.”⁵⁶ This is especially true of the phrase “eternal life,”⁵⁷ but also of other expressions such as John 10:10, where Christ claimed to provide “abundant life” (ζωήν...περισσάν); 1 Timothy 6:19, where one looks to the future for “life that is truly life” [NIV] (τῆς ἁπλως ζωῆς); James 1:12 and Romans 2:7, where “life” (ζωή) is the reward of a lifetime of perseverance; 2 Corinthians 2:16, where the believer is appointed from “life unto life” (ζωῆς εἰς ζωήν), that is, moving “ever

⁵⁵E.g., συζωοποιέω, “to make alive” (Eph 2:5; Col 2:13); ζωοποιέω, “to make alive” (John 5:21; 6:63; Rom 4:17; 8:11; 2 Cor 3:6; Gal 3:21; 1 Pet 3:18); ζώντας, “alive” (Rom 6:11, 13).

⁵⁶Rolland D. McCune, “Systematic Theology III” (class notes, Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, Spring 1998), p. 35.

⁵⁷F. F. Bruce notes that this phrase “primarily means the life of the age to come, resurrection life, which believers enjoy in advance because of their union with one who is already risen from the dead” (*The Gospel of John* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1983], p. 89). D. A. Carson makes a similar observation, adding that this “life may in some measure be experienced before the end, just as in the Synoptics the kingdom dawns before the end” (*The Gospel According to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991], p. 202). Leon Morris describes it as “the life proper to the age to come” (*The Gospel According to John*, rev. ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995], p. 201). See also C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to John*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), p. 179; J. Carl Laney, *John*, Moody Gospel Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), p. 81; Merrill C. Tenney, “John,” in vol. 9 of the *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), p. 50; BDAG, s.v. ζωή, pp. 430–31; *NIDNTT*, s.v. “Life,” 2:480–83; *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. “ζῶω,” by Rudolf Bultmann, 2:861–72 [hereafter cited as *TDNT*]; *EDNT*, s.v. “ζωή,” by Luise Schottroff, 2:105–109; Nigel Turner, *Christian Words* (Nashville: Nelson, 1982), p. 456; and the discussion in *NIDNTT*, s.v. “Life,” by Hans-Georg Link, pp. 480–83. Note also BDAG’s discussion of ζῶ in John: “In [John] the blessed life which the follower of Jesus enjoys here and now in the body is simply continued in the heavenly life of the future. In other respects also the dividing line betw. the present and the future life is somet. non-existent or at least not discernible” (p. 425).

more deeply into the divine life”;⁵⁸ 1 Peter 3:10 where “life” (ζωή) is defined as “seeing good days.” This understanding of “life” as a *quality* of life,⁵⁹ and not regeneration, is the prevailing understanding of the ζωή word group in the NT.⁶⁰

As was the case with the term “salvation,” “life” is too broad to fit consistently at a single place in one’s *ordo salutis*. Life “follows” belief in all the passages listed above, but, using this logic, it also “follows” justification (Titus 3:7), sanctification (Rom 6:22), perseverance (Rom 2:7; Jude 21),⁶¹ and even physical death (2 Cor 5:4). With this in view, the “life” described in these passages cannot mean regeneration. What is in view is the enjoyment of life in which the believer finally realizes what it truly means to live as God intended, whether presently or in the eschaton.⁶²

⁵⁸BDAG, s.v. “ζωή,” p. 430.

⁵⁹We have already noted that John Walvoord is rightly adamant in maintaining that regeneration life is eternal life (*Holy Spirit*, pp. 131–32). In his *Systematic Theology*, however, Chafer takes Walvoord’s emphasis (drawing from a 1943 syllabus which Walvoord adapted in 1954 to become his book) and erroneously concludes that since regeneration imparts eternal life, then all references to eternal life are references to regeneration. As a result, he makes the following argument for the priority of faith to regeneration from John 3:16: “What statement could be more direct or conclusive than this? It is asserted that ‘whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.’ Thus without exception all that enters into salvation, including the gift of eternal life depends only on the one human requirement of believing on the Savior” (6:113–14). Apart from his discussion of John 1:12, Chafer’s entire argument that faith precedes regeneration rests on this understanding of John 3:16. Also appealing to this passage to support faith before regeneration are Lewis and Demarest (*Integrative Theology*, 3:104).

⁶⁰This is not to say that the “abundant life” enjoyed now and anticipated in the future is totally unrelated to regeneration: regeneration is a prerequisite of the “abundant life.” However, “abundant life” and “regeneration” are not synonyms.

⁶¹To this passage we add two references to the “crown of life” (τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς—Jas 1:12; Rev 2:10) offered to persevering believers, in which phrase the term ζωῆς is usually regarded as an epexegetic genitive, rendering a translation “the crown *which is life*” (Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, Pillar New Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000], p. 70; D. Edmond Herbert, *James*, rev. ed. [Chicago: Moody Press, 1992], p. 84; Peter Davids, *Commentary on James*, New International Greek Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982], p. 80; Ralph P. Martin, *James*, Word Biblical Commentary [Waco, TX: Word, 1988], p. 33).

⁶²The eschatological element is not absolutely clear in all the NT uses of “life” (ζωή). BDAG, for instance, divides the believer’s ζωή into two general categories: life “without (clear) eschatol. implications, of the life of grace and holiness,” and life “in the blessed period of final consummation” (p. 430). Paul, for instance, views life “in a total and comprehensive sense.... Present and future in Paul cannot be separated temporally or materially” (*EDNT*, s.v. “ζωή,” by Luise Schottroff, 2:107). However,

Again, however, the unspoken syllogism introduced above is revived, with only a few minor changes:

- A: Faith results in life broadly defined.
 B: Regeneration is an aspect of life broadly defined.

∴ C: Faith results in regeneration.

But the arguments from the earlier syllogism carry over to this one. Just because “life” follows faith, it does not follow that *every single aspect* of life must follow faith, or that life is absent prior to the exercise of faith.⁶³ As proof, we note at least 18 passages (Matt 25:46; Mark 10:30; John 14:19; Rom 2:7; 6:22; 2 Cor 2:16; 5:4; 13:4; 1 Thess 5:10; 1 Tim 6:19; 2 Tim 1:1; Titus 1:1–2; 3:7; Jas 1:12; 1 John 2:25; 5:16; Jude 21; Rev 2:10) in which “life” or “living” is offered as a present benefit to be seized or a future benefit to be anticipated by *established believers who have long been regenerate*. “Life” in these 18 passages certainly is not regeneration, yet the writers felt comfortable using ζῶν because of the breadth of the meaning of the term. Likewise, it is impossible to insist that references to “faith unto life” have the specific meaning “faith unto regeneration.” As with the package term “salvation,” the believer has the whole soteriological package of “life,” much of which remains future.

The Absence of Logical Succession

An alternative line of reasoning is that these passages, despite the logical sequence markers of future tense and subjunctive mood, are not intended to advance a logical succession—the purpose of the passages is not to present a formal *ordo*.

In the last section some 18 verses were listed in which the bestowal of life falls “after” regeneration. In Romans 6:22,⁶⁴ freedom from sin

lexicographers note that even for John, whose usage of ζῶν reflects a broadly present idea, the eschatological element in the term is not absent (*NIDNTT*, s.v. “Life,” 2:482–83; *EDNT*, s.v. “ζῶν,” 2:107–108; *TDNT*, s.v. “ζῶν,” 2:861–72). No lexicon lists “regeneration” as the meaning of life, even in John.

⁶³Perhaps the following analogy may be an effective illustration. Just as John says, “If you believe you will live,” a doctor might make the following statement to a gravely injured person: “If you receive proper medical treatment, you will live.” There is no implication that the injured man had no life prior to medical treatment or, even more absurdly, that conception and birth would follow the administration of medical treatment. Yet his “life” may still be regarded as future, even though some of it is past. Just as physical life is a “package,” so also is spiritual life.

⁶⁴“Having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you have fruit that yields a

“precedes” sanctification, which in turn “precedes” eternal life. Only two options emerge for understanding this verse. (1) Arguing from the previous section, one may deduce that, although this “life” is surely dependent on regeneration, regeneration is not in view in this particular usage of “life.”⁶⁵ Or, (2) if one insists that “life” *always* includes regeneration, he must conclude that the NT authors sometimes mix elements of salvation, even while employing apparent sequence markers. As such, they do not intend sequence but mere association.

We might further add that, in presenting the gospel, it is rather unwieldy to answer the question, “What must I do to have eternal life?” with the theological statements, “You must be elected by God in order to have eternal life,” or “You must be effectually called by God in order to have eternal life,” or “You must be regenerated by God in order to have eternal life.” We trust that God has paved the way with his unilateral soteriological activities, and so we move naturally to the first aspect of the gospel in which the person has an active role: faith. Our answer is “You must believe on Christ in order to have eternal life.” Is this answer misleading or inaccurate—a concession to the Arminian? No. The answer simply lacks theological precision, an imprecision which the writers of Scripture are, and which we ourselves must be, content to maintain.

Passages Expressing the Employment of the Word unto Regeneration

1 Peter 1:22–23—“You have been *born again*, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, by the living and enduring *word of God*.”

James 1:18—“He gave us *birth* through the *word of truth*.”

The argument raised through this (again, non-exhaustive) list goes as follows: if the Word of God is instrumental in regenerating a person, then that person must be enabled to understand, welcome, and believe the Word (i.e., exercise faith) *before* being regenerated.⁶⁶ Three solutions have emerged to solve the tension of the instrumentality⁶⁷ of the Word in the initial and monergistic work of God in regenerating.

harvest of sanctification, the culmination of which is eternal life.”

⁶⁵See e.g., Moo, *Romans*, p. 408. This is the author’s preference.

⁶⁶See esp. Ryrie, *Holy Spirit*, p. 91.

⁶⁷Common grammatical structures denoting agency are used in both verses: in James 1:18 the dative of means and in 1 Peter 1:23 διὰ with a genitive object.

A Lexical Solution

Millard Erickson, who argues for the priority of faith to regeneration, nonetheless excludes these passages from his discussion, describing the references to the λόγῳ ἀληθείας of James 1:18 and the λόγου ζωῆτος of 1 Peter 1:23 as synonyms for regeneration.⁶⁸ Joining him are several commentators who view the “word” as a reference to the creative activity of God in giving life,⁶⁹ thus excluding it from this discussion. This option is attractive to this author’s argument. However, the usage of the phrase elsewhere in Scripture (2 Cor 6:7; Eph 1:13; Col 1:5; and 2 Tim 2:15) points to this “word” being the Gospel.⁷⁰

A Grammatical Solution

Another option comes in noting that while the use of δᾶ with the genitive usually denotes means or instrumentality, this is not always true. BDAG, for instance, notes that the grammatical structure may denote “attendant circumstance,”⁷¹ including in the discussion passages like 2 Corinthians 2:4 (“I wrote...*with* many tears”⁷²); 1 John 5:6 (“Jesus comes *with* the water of baptism and *with* the blood of redemption”⁷³). From the Petrine writings we might add to these 1 Peter 3:20

⁶⁸*Christian Theology*, p. 956.

⁶⁹See L. E. Elliott-Binns, “James 1:18: Creation or Redemption?” *New Testament Studies* 3 (1956): 148–61. See also Martin, *James*, pp. 39–40; F. J. A. Hort, *The Epistle of St. James* (London: MacMillan, 1909), p. 32; idem, *The First Epistle of St. Peter 1:1–2:17* (London: MacMillan, 1898), p. 92; J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1988), p. 77.

⁷⁰Moo, *James*, pp. 79–80; Hiebert, *James*, pp. 102–4; Davids, *James*, pp. 88–90; Homer A. Kent, Jr., *Faith that Works: Studies in the Epistle of James* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), p. 56; Donald W. Burdick, “James,” in vol. 12 of the *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), p. 173; D. Edmond Hiebert, *1 Peter*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), p. 115; J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude* (reprint of 1969 ed., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), pp. 80–81.

⁷¹Def. 3c, p. 224; cf. also *EDNT*, s.v. “δῖα,” by A. J. Hess, def. 2a, 1:296; F. Blass and A. DeBrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. and rev. Robert W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 223.3, p. 119; A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, 5th ed. (Nashville: Broadman, 1934), p. 583.

⁷²See Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1986), p. 36.

⁷³Translation from BAGD, p. 179; cf. also Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 174–78; Donald W. Burdick, *The Letters of John the Apostle* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), p. 368; I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of St. John*, New International Commentary on

(Noah and his family “were saved *through* water”⁷⁴); 1 Peter 5:12 (“I have written to you *with* briefness = briefly”⁷⁵); possibly 2 Peter 3:5 (“The earth was formed out of water and *by* water”⁷⁶). This list could be extended, but it seems the point has been made that δᾶ with the genitive may be used to denote sphere or attendant circumstance. Admittedly, this author could find no commentary on 1 Peter 1:23 that made this affirmation, but the possibility still stands as a grammatical option. If this option is accepted, then regeneration in 1 Peter 1:23 merely takes place *in association with* the word, eliminating the value of this text for an *ordo salutis*. The dative case finds even broader usage, easily accommodating James 1:18 under the same basic argument.

A Solution Drawn from the Limitations of Language

A final solution to the problem is the limitation of human language. Every consistently biblical understanding of regeneration understands that the Word is somehow involved in regeneration. Robert Reymond’s comments are representative and reflect this author’s understanding:

By the regenerating work of his Spirit, God the Father irresistibly summons, normally in conjunction with the church’s *proclamation of the gospel*, the elect sinner into fellowship with, and into the kingdom of, his Son Jesus Christ. His call is rendered effectual by the quickening work of the Spirit of God the Father and God the Son in the hearts of the elect.

By the Spirit’s regenerating work the elect sinner (1) is made spiritually alive, thereby opening and favorably disposing him to the *things of the Spirit*, which were foolishness to him before (1 Cor. 2:14), (2) is

the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), pp. 231–32; John R. W. Stott, *The Letters of John*, rev. ed., Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), p. 180; and the majority of commentators. But see Lenski for strict adherence to the idea of means (*The Epistles of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John, and St. Jude* [Columbus, OH: Wartburg Press, 1945], pp. 525–26).

⁷⁴Here we apparently have a meaning of locus or sphere. See Hiebert, *1 Peter*, p. 246; Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), p. 142, n. 44; Kelly, *Epistles of Peter and Jude*, p. 159. Michaels, however, apparently argues for both the locative and instrumental meaning at once (*1 Peter*, p. 213).

⁷⁵The phrase is no doubt idiomatic, but the instrumental idea is, indeed, absent.

⁷⁶Commentaries are split on this particular text, some seeing an instrumental idea (Kelly, *Epistles of Peter and Jude*, pp. 358–59; Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary [Waco, TX: Word, 1983], p. 298) and others a locative idea (D. Edmond Hiebert, *Second Peter and Jude* [Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1989], pp. 146–47; Robertson, *Grammar*, pp. 580–81). All, however, admit the grammatical possibility of the latter.

convinced of his sin, (3) is enlightened to the all-sufficiency of the Savior Jesus Christ as he is offered in the *gospel*, and (4) is renewed in his will, rendering him thereby willing (no sinner is brought to Christ against his will!) and able to embrace Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord.⁷⁷

In Reymond's discussion we find that the Word of God, while issuing as the general call, finds sudden efficacy when the sinner is regenerated, rendering the general call efficacious. If one is brutally technical, he could conclude that the Word is not precisely the instrument of regeneration, but only the sphere in which the Holy Spirit's regenerating activity uniformly takes place. But it does not seem that this finely tuned theological understanding need to be expressed in equally fine-tuned grammatical structures in order to be regarded as accurate or true.

THE ARGUMENT THAT REGENERATION PRECEDES FAITH DEFENDED EXEGETICALLY

The defense of the priority of regeneration to saving faith will again proceed on three lines: (1) passages expressing a logical sequence of regeneration→faith→life; (2) passages whose syntax demands the priority of regeneration; and (3) a passage whose theological emphasis demands the priority of regeneration.

Passages Expressing a Logical Sequence of Regeneration→Faith→Life

Deuteronomy 30:6—Yahweh your God will also circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendents so that you will love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul in order that you may live.

Titus 3:5–7—⁵He saved us, not because of righteous deeds which we performed, but because of his mercy, through the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs with respect to the hope of eternal life.⁷⁸

⁷⁷*New Systematic Theology*, p. 718, italics added.

⁷⁸We might add to these Deuteronomy 5:29—"Oh that they had such a heart in them, that they might fear me and always keep all my commandments"; Ezekiel 11:19–20—"I will give them one heart and put a new spirit within them. I will remove their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh, so that they may observe in my statutes, obey my ordinances, and do them"; and Zephaniah 3:9—"At that time I will place in the peoples a purified lip, so that they may call on the name of Yahweh and serve him with one accord."

Deuteronomy 30:6

Set within a second iteration of the Mosaic covenant of Yahweh with Israel, this passage deals with the eschatological restoration of Israel at the Second Advent. The verse is to be viewed as a conditional aspect of the covenant; however, the wording of the passage is given such that it should be viewed as a certainty—a predictive prophecy.

Regeneration and Faith in Deuteronomy 30:6

Regeneration makes its debut early in the verse in the “circumcision of the heart” (קָלַל לֵב), an idiom that also appears in Deuteronomy 10:16 and Jeremiah 4:4.⁷⁹ The idiom is widely recognized among theologians, even those who regard faith as theologically prior to regeneration, as a synonym for regeneration.⁸⁰ Commentators also identify this spiritual circumcision as regeneration, some actually using the term,⁸¹ others opting for more nebulous terms like “the direct operation of God in man’s heart” or “inward renewal.”⁸² All, however, note the parallel between this passage and the “heart of flesh” in Ezekiel 11:19, 18:31, and 36:25–26, passages strongly attested as references to the new birth and commonly regarded as the backdrop for the exchange between Christ and Nicodemus in John 3.⁸³ In John 3 there

⁷⁹We might add to these Jeremiah 9:25 and Ezekiel 44:7, 9, where the antonym “uncircumcised in heart” (עָרֵל לֵב) is employed.

⁸⁰Erickson, *Christian Theology*, p. 993; Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 3:85. Neither Walvoord nor Ryrie discuss this passage in their works on the Holy Spirit, and Chafer’s description of the circumcised heart as “divine enablement,” “inclination of the heart,” and a changed “attitude of heart” in his *Grace* (Findlay, OH: Dunham Publishing Co., 1922), pp. 196–99, is somewhat ambiguous. James F. Rand, then head librarian and occasional instructor at DTS, states of the phrase, “In the language of the New Testament they have been born again” (“Problems in Literal Interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount,” part 1, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 112 [January 1955]: 33.

⁸¹Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), p. 338. However, note Hermann Ridderbos, *Deuteronomy*, Bible Student’s Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), p. 270.

⁸²Peter C. Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), p. 364; see also S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, 3rd ed., International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902), p. 330; Earl S. Kalland, “Deuteronomy,” in vol. 3 of the *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelien (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), p. 187; J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1974), p. 285.

⁸³Paul also picks up the theme of the circumcised heart in Rom 2:25–29 and Col 2:11–13. Here again we find unambiguous vocabulary that identifies his understanding of the concept as regeneration: the circumcision of the heart is a unilateral,

can be no mistake: reference to regeneration is certain in the lucid phrases “born of the Spirit” and “born from above.”⁸⁴ In fact, this author could find no evangelical apart from a single commentator⁸⁵ who denied the presence of regeneration in this phrase. Debate surrounding this verse is not with respect to the existence of God’s unilateral work of regeneration in it.⁸⁶

References to saving faith and attendant works of repentance are also plentiful in Deuteronomy 30. In fact, as shall be shown, it is their superabundance, not their absence, which is the theological sticking point. In verse 6, Moses states the result of regeneration: “loving Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul.” This reference to Israel’s great *Shema* (Deut 6:4–5) does not include the terms “belief” and “trust,” but there are several factors which point to this phrase being, or at least including, faith. The first is found in the verb “love.” While love includes affection, the fact that it engages the heart, soul, and mind, that is, the seat of the intellect and will, the human

life-giving work of the Holy Spirit that enables the life of obedience.

⁸⁴Some key articles describing the connection between Ezek 36 and John 3 include Linda L. Belleville, “‘Born of Water and Spirit’: John 3:5,” *Trinity Journal* 1 (Fall 1980): 125–41; Robert V. McCabe, “The Meaning of ‘Born of Water and the Spirit’ in John 3:5,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 4 (Fall 1999): 85–107; Zane C. Hodges, “Water and Spirit—John 3:5,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135 (July–September 1978): 206–220.

⁸⁵Ridderbos, *Deuteronomy*, p. 270. Ridderbos, who regards regeneration as prior to faith, rejects this circumcision of the heart as a reference to regeneration because of his mistaken understanding that faith and repentance are sequentially prior to the circumcision of the heart of v. 6. This problem will be discussed below.

⁸⁶One might object that the circumcision of the heart, as a *command* by God for individual Israelites to perform (Deut 10:16; Jer 4:4; cf. also Ezek 18:30–32), prevents this circumcising being God’s unilateral work of regeneration. But it is not uncommon for Scripture to command individuals to do works that are entirely or at least partially God’s. God’s justice does not require that he provide ability attendant to his holy demands. For instance, he commands us to “believe,” an action divinely initiated (Phil 2:13) and “not of ourselves” (Eph 2:8–9), “be holy: (1 Pet 1:15–16) “be clean” (καθαρίσθητι—Mark 1:41), “be saved” (σώθητε—Acts 2:40), “be reconciled” (καταλλάγητε—2 Cor 5:20), “be made complete” (καταρτίζεσθε—2 Cor 13:11), etc. The NT authors apparently did not view these commands as inherently unjust or paradoxical. Instead of being commands to do God’s own work, they are commands to confirm God’s work through resultant acts of obedience.

See Robert Althann, “*Mwl*, ‘Circumcise’ with the *Lamedh* of Agency,” *Biblica* 62 (1981): 239–40; also Peter C. Craigie, Page H. Kelley, and Joel F. Drinkard, Jr., *Jeremiah 1–25*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1991), p. 67, for an alternative grammatical explanation defending the “circumcision of the heart” as God’s unilateral work of regeneration.

control center,⁸⁷ demonstrates that it includes more than simple affection. It also includes the knowledge, assent, and unreserved trust that define faith. Loving God with the entire person entails a “willing and joyful obedience,”⁸⁸ a reverent trust and submission that results in Godward action.⁸⁹ We find, second, that early Jewish commentaries on the *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4 and 30:6 also reflect this understanding. One early Jewish summary of the *Shema* reads, “Fear the Lord and love your neighbor,”⁹⁰ expressly equating “loving God” with “fearing God.” The “fear of Yahweh,” an OT synonym for faith,⁹¹ is centered in the “one heart” requirement: fear of God is impossible without the singular employment of the heart.⁹² Third, is the inclusion of such verbs as “take to heart” (אֶל־לִבְךָ—v. 1), “return” (שׁוּב—vv. 2, 10), and “obey” (שָׁמַע—vv. 2, 8, 10), all qualified by the phrase, “with all your heart and soul” (בְּכָל לִבְךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ—vv. 2, 10). These must be the deeds of systemic repentance that follow saving faith. Finally we find the inspired commentary on the *Shema* given in Luke 10:25–28. In this passage we find a lawyer querying Christ about receiving eternal life. Christ’s response is given in the words of the *Shema*. This is not a promotion of a work’s salvation, for salvation has never been achieved in this way. Instead, in the words of one commentator, Christ’s answer has “as its heart...an expression of total allegiance and devotion that in other contexts could be called faith.”⁹³ In summary, when Moses

⁸⁷Francis Brown, Samuel R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (reprint ed., Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1972), s.v. “לֵב, לִב,” pp. 523–25 [hereafter cited as BDB]; *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, s.v. “לֵב,” by Andrew Bowling, 1:466–67 [hereafter cited as TWOT]; *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, s.v. “לֵב,” by Alex Luc, 2:749 [hereafter cited as NIDOTTE]; *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, s.v. “לֵב,” by H. J. Fabry, 7:429–34 [hereafter cited as TDOT].

⁸⁸Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, p. 170.

⁸⁹See Moshe Weinfeld, “Covenant Terminology,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 93 (1973): 190–99. Also his *Deuteronomy 1–11*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1991), pp. 351–52.

⁹⁰“The Testament of Benjamin Concerning a Pure Mind,” 3:3, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, 2 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 1:825; *The Book of Jubilees* 36:8–9, in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2:124.

⁹¹Prov 1:7; Heb 11:17; cf. Gen 22:12; Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “Wisdom Theology and the Centre of Old Testament Theology,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 50 (July–September 1978): 132–146; John Murray, *Principles of Conduct* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), p. 242.

⁹²Ps 86:11; Jer 32:39; cf. also Prov 23:17.

⁹³Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 1025. See also Robert H. Stein, *Luke*,

speaks of loving Yahweh with the whole heart, he is speaking of the exercise of saving faith manifested in a life of obedience to the covenant.

Logical Sequence in Deuteronomy 30:6

Only one problem stands in the way of appealing to the logical connector וְ and rephrasing the verse, "Yahweh will regenerate you so that (וְ) you will exercise saving faith." That problem is the presence of faith and repentance in the chapter as early as verse 2. It appears at first glance that faith precedes regeneration after all. The commentaries, however, generally follow one of two approaches in affirming the contrary. In the first of these, J. A. Thompson champions the view that there is no sequence in the full pericope, only in verse 6:

Comparison with Ezekiel 36:24–36; 37:23–28 is of interest. Cf. Romans 11:25–27. In these passages God seems to be taking the initiative in restoring His people and in cleansing them for His name's sake, apparently before they repent. However, no contradiction need be suggested. The Old Testament writers were not always concerned with exact chronological sequence. The one thing that seems clear is that a new heart and a new spirit would characterize a restored people.... The origin of repentance itself lies in the divine activity. Certainly the origin of heart-love for Yahweh lies in Yahweh Himself.⁹⁴

A more satisfying solution is found in treating Deuteronomy 30:1–10 as a concentric⁹⁵ or "enveloping structure"⁹⁶ with various acts of faith and repentance in verses 1, 2, 8, and 10 all flowing outward from the theological center of the passage: the regeneration effected in verse 6. As such, none of the activities of the surrounding verses are independent of the regenerating activity of verse 6, but products of it. Three factors suggest this theory is correct: (1) the readily apparent parallels between verses 2a/10b; 2b/10a; and 7–9/3–5,⁹⁷ (2) the acceptable

New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), p. 316; Leon Morris, *Luke*, rev. ed., Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), p. 206; I. Howard Marshall, *Luke*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), p. 443.

⁹⁴*Deuteronomy*, p. 285. See also James Rand, who seems to suggest that the repentance of vv. 1–2 is comparable to the legalistic righteousness of the Pharisees, but that that righteousness is made meritorious in v. 6 by the impartation of the circumcised heart ("Problems in Literal Interpretation," p. 33).

⁹⁵Christopher Wright, *Deuteronomy*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), pp. 289–90.

⁹⁶Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 386.

⁹⁷See esp. Wright's proposal of a concentric arrangement (*Deuteronomy*, p. 289).

translation of the initial ך in verse 6 as recapitulative rather than a simple indicator of coordination or sequence,⁹⁸ and (3) the fact that the entire passage is a predictive prophecy of what God would do, not an exhortation for Israel to do anything.⁹⁹ To conclude, then, Moses was making a clear statement of order: regeneration precedes faith.

Equally significant to the fact that regeneration produces saving faith in Deuteronomy 30:6 is yet another sequence: faith produces¹⁰⁰ life. What is the “life” that is in view? It surely cannot be a synonym for regeneration, for this has already been bestowed. This subsequent bestowal of “life” after regeneration is significant to our study, because it clearly demonstrates that OT “life” occurs *apart from the idea of regeneration*. What is this “life”?

Most suggest that this “life” is simply the life of blessing in the land of the covenant (cf. v. 16).¹⁰¹ This “life” is no “abstract principle of vitality,” but an “experience of life...the ability to exercise all one’s vital powers to the fullest.”¹⁰² Concurring with this thought of abundant life is the following lexical data: “Without promising unending physical life, Deut describes a quality of life that is firmly rooted in relationship to Yahweh,”¹⁰³ described later as “a blessed life.”¹⁰⁴ Added to these are the comments of H. Ringgren: “Life means blessing...enjoy[ment] of a full, rich, and happy life,”¹⁰⁵ complete with both physical and spiritual aspects.¹⁰⁶ However, it is difficult to see the

⁹⁸Cf. NASB and NRSV, where “moreover” is employed.

⁹⁹Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 389; Gerhard von Rad, *Deuteronomy*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), p. 183.

¹⁰⁰The Hebrew particle לְעֵינֵינוּ employed here means literally “for the sake of” or “for the purpose that,” and introduces a “variation of the common expression ‘that you may live,’ 19; 4:1; 5:33; 8:1; 16:20; cf. Je. 31:31ff.; 32:39–41; Ezk. 36:24ff” (Thompson, *Deuteronomy*, p. 285).

¹⁰¹Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 330; apparently also Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, p. 364, and Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), p. 285. See also Patrick Fairbairn’s *Exposition of Ezekiel* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1851), pp. 215–16, and Walter Kaiser, “Leviticus 18:5 and Paul: Do This and You Shall Live (Eternally?)” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 14 (January 1971): 25.

¹⁰²TWOT, s.v. “חַיָּה,” by Elmer B. Smick, 1:279.

¹⁰³NIDOTTE, s.v. “חַיָּה,” by Terry L. Bremsinger, 2:109.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 2:112.

¹⁰⁵TDOT, s.v. “חַיָּה,” 4:333–34.

¹⁰⁶Bremsinger notes, for instance, that there is a spiritual dimension to the abundance of life (“חַיָּה,” 2:110), citing esp. several passages in Ezekiel 18. In short, included in the abundant life is not only physical fulfillment and reward, but also the capacity

specific concept of regeneration in the passages employing words from the חיה word group. In fact, after perusing the lexicons, this author is convinced that the חיה word group never denotes “regeneration” in its usage in the OT.¹⁰⁷ As we have seen, the OT Jew used other terms to describe regeneration.

A second alternative is that this passage looks beyond the temporal blessings of covenant life to a time of eschatological restoration and eternal blessing.¹⁰⁸ Rudolf Bultmann summarizes the “life” anticipated by the Jew:

Is eschatological life really life in a new sense? To a large extent this undoubtedly is not so. The fact that life is regarded as everlasting does not alter the concept.... There is some modification, however, in the fact that the eschatological life is regarded as a life without sin, and that it is also to some extent thought of as a life which is no longer subject to present conditions and vital expressions.¹⁰⁹

In fact, this alternative is not mutually exclusive of the first. Verse 16 renders it nearly certain that the life of covenant blessing in the land is

to worship and enjoy God and know the pleasure of his blessing. As such, “life” often, if not always, includes a spiritual element (the OT Jew did not divorce physical from spiritual). This admission, however, in no way proves that “life” in Ezek 18 or anywhere else in the OT is simple regeneration. When we read the phrase “repent and live” (Ezek 18:32), raised by Brensinger, we need not conclude that it means “repent and be regenerated.” In fact, Ezekiel’s alternative to living, “to die” (v. 31, 32a), seems to seal the fact that the physical is dominant (cf. esp. v. 4, 13 where the *living* shall die or be put to death). The life here is not regeneration, but the preservation of life *already possessed* (physical). Any spiritual dimension of life that is in view here is integrally tied to the physical. There is a general principle here that obedience results in life and disobedience in death (in both the physical and spiritual realms), but it would seem somewhat forced to conclude that Ezekiel was specifically teaching that repentance and obedience result in regeneration.

Another passage, Lev 18:5, implies that perfect obedience to the Law would result in life, and, according to the commentary by Gal 3:11–12, even eternal life (but see Kaiser, “Leviticus 18:5 and Paul,” pp. 19–28). Again, we note that the reference is not to regeneration, but to the hypothetical reward of eternal life after a lifetime of perfect obedience to the Law.

¹⁰⁷English synonyms for regeneration are absent in the discussions by Elmer Smick (*TWOT*, s.v. “חיה,” 1:279–82), Terry L. Brensinger (*NIDOTTE*, s.v. “חיה,” 2:108–13), H. Ringgren (*TDOT*, s.v. “חיה,” 4:324–44), *BDB*, s.v. “חיה,” pp. 310–12; Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 5 vols., rev. W. Baumgartner and J. J. Stamm (Leiden: Brill, 1994–2000), s.v. “חיה,” 3:309–10; David J. A. Clines, ed., *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, 5 vols. to date (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994–), s.v. “חיה,” 2:204–209.

¹⁰⁸Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 389.

¹⁰⁹*TDNT*, s.v. “ζάω,” 2:857.

in view; however, the eschatological context of the passage also makes the second alternative unavoidable. What is in view here is eschatological life with all the fulfillments and blessings that accompany life in the Kingdom of our Lord, and in the eternal bliss that follows. All believers have received the life of regeneration, but we all persevere in faith and good works in anticipation of really living. This is the promise of Deuteronomy 30:6 and the backdrop for the NT identity of “life” discussed above.

Titus 3:5–7

Though reference to faith is oblique or absent in this passage, it merits discussion because (1) it is the only passage in the Bible that actually uses the term “regeneration” (παλιγγενεσία) in a soteriological context, and (2) it gives a clear example of the NT usage of “life” and “salvation” in their non-regenerative sense.

A partial *ordo salutis* is given in these verses. Regeneration and renewal¹¹⁰ come first, followed by justification, adoption, and eternal life lumped under the umbrella, “he saved us” (ἔσωσεν ἡμᾶς).¹¹¹

Paul does not, in Titus 3, list “faith” as one of these post-regeneration activities. However, he does list “eternal life.” We have already noted that in most NT uses of “life” ζάω and its cognates do not mean the inception of life. No clearer evidence of this can be found than here in Titus 3:7.¹¹² Paul states unequivocally that

¹¹⁰The “washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit” are the rebirth and recreation of the individual whereby he is given a new nature. The καί may be exegetical, so that the “renewal” simply explains what takes place in regeneration or, more likely, it may be copulative, uniting the negative and positive aspects of regeneration (putting off the old and putting on the new) (William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary [Dallas: Word, 2000], p. 449; Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, New International Biblical Commentary [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988], p. 204; George W. Knight, III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, New International Greek Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992], pp. 340–44; Homer Kent, *The Pastoral Epistles* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1958], p. 241). In any case, regeneration is the initial event.

¹¹¹We have in Titus 3 a clear example of the “package” understanding of “salvation.” Here we find that God “saved us” (ἔσωσεν ἡμᾶς) *by means of* (διὰ) regeneration, thus precluding the possibility that “salvation” here means or even includes regeneration. Instead, the term in this instance must mean events in the *ordo salutis* that follow regeneration.

¹¹²Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, p. 206; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, p. 451; J. N. D. Kelly, *Pastoral Epistles* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1963), p. 253. Note, however, a dissenting voice in Homer A. Kent, Jr., who views the inheritance as “eternal life’s hope,” implying that here described is a present hope of one who has already received eternal life at regeneration (*Pastoral Epistles*, 1958), p. 243. It seems more in keeping with the verse that part of the believer’s hope is the future realization of eter-

regeneration must occur *in order that* (ὥστε) eternal life may result. It is obvious that this “life” is not regeneration, but the eschatological experience of “life that truly is life” (1 Tim 6:19).

Passages Whose Syntax Demands the Priority of Regeneration

John 1:12–13—¹²But to all those who received him, that is, to those who are believing in his name, he gave the authority to become children of God. ¹³These were not born of natural descent, nor of human decision, nor of a husband’s will, but of God.

1 John 5:1—Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the one who gave life also loves the one who has been born of him.

John 1:12–13

This text is highly significant for our discussion, because it is claimed as a proof text by both sides of the debate.¹¹³

Regeneration and Faith in John 1:12–13

No one doubts that regeneration appears in John 1:13. All agree that regeneration is present in the aorist passive form of γεννάω (“have been born”). However, Lewis Sperry Chafer sees in verse 12 an antecedent reference to regeneration in the “right to become children of God” (ἐξουσίαν τέκνα θεοῦ γενέσθαι). Since this right follows faith in verse 12, Chafer renders John 1:12 his crux passage for proving that regeneration follows faith.¹¹⁴ Central to Chafer’s argument is his understanding that the expression “children of God” (τέκνα θεοῦ) used in verse 12 is not a reference to adoption (which is relational), but a more primitive, positional standing synonymous with regeneration. The phrase denoting adoption, he continues, is υἱοὶ θεοῦ.¹¹⁵ Standing against this conclusion, however, are four factors: (1) Τέκνα θεοῦ is used elsewhere to refer to adoption (Rom 8:15–16); (2) John’s preference of τέκνα θεοῦ to υἱοὶ θεοῦ is not due to a soteriological techni -

nal life.

¹¹³Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 3:104; Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 6:113; apparently Erickson, *Christian Theology*, pp. 974–75; Reymond, *Systematic Theology*, p. 708; etc.

¹¹⁴*Systematic Theology*, 6:113.

¹¹⁵*Ibid.*, 3:241–43; 7:9–11.

cality, but to a desire to reserve the label υἱὸς θεοῦ for Christ;¹¹⁶ (3) adoption is emptied of meaning (Chafer's explanations notwithstanding) if the regeneration has already placed the believer into the family of God and given him all the privileges of heirs; and (4) nearly all the pertinent theologies¹¹⁷ and many of the commentaries¹¹⁸ view John 1:12 as a key text describing the adoption of the believer. We conclude, then, that the sonship of John 1:12 refers explicitly to adoption, and not to regeneration. As such, John 1:12 merely serves to place adoption after faith in the *ordo salutis*, a placement which all concede.¹¹⁹

There is agreement that faith appears variously in the aorist form of λαμβάνω ("have received")¹²⁰ and the present participle of πιστεύω ("who are believing")¹²¹ in verse 12. Agreement is lacking, however, in identifying faith in verse 13. Admittedly, no precise synonym for faith appears in this verse; however, a class of activities that *includes* faith is mentioned: acts of the human will. Some propose that verse 13 attempts only to discredit one's pedigree as giving any advantage in God's bestowal of regeneration.¹²² However, the phrases used exceed the features essential to a diminution of pedigree. Instead, we find a natural progression and compounding of phrases to radically destroy

¹¹⁶Carson, *John*, p. 126; Morris, *John*, p. 87.

¹¹⁷E.g., Erickson, *Christian Theology*, p. 974; Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, p. 306; Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 3:151; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 738; Raymond, *New Systematic Theology*, p. 759.

¹¹⁸E.g., Carson, *John*, p. 126; Bruce, *John*, p. 38; Hermann Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), p. 45; John Calvin, *The Gospel According to St. John*, part 1, trans. T. H. L. Parker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), p. 17.

¹¹⁹See esp. Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, pp. 81, 87, 132–34; Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, pp. 96, 185–87; also Erickson, *Christian Theology*, pp. 974–75; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 738–39.

¹²⁰Dan Wallace denies that this is a synonym for saving faith, viewing it rather as a reference to "Jews in Palestine who received Jesus into their homes and treated him as a true prophet" (cf. v. 11) (*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996], p. 382, n. 71). While I prefer to see this as a more general reference to faith, the idea of "welcoming" is not impossible based on the understanding of 1 Cor 2:14 adopted below.

¹²¹Raymond describes λαμβάνω as "the appointed instrumentality that 'appropriates' Christ and his benefits from the perspective of its inception," and πιστεύω as "viewing that same faith in Christ as the appointed instrumentality whereby the Christian *continues* to appropriate Christ's benefits throughout his entire Christian experience" (*New Systematic Theology*, p. 708).

¹²²Bruce, *John*, pp. 38–39.

all notions of similarity of the *human function* in physical and spiritual birth: the new birth is not natural; it is not a product of physical exchange; it is not even a product of human will.¹²³ Carson notes, "Even though the three negations of 1.13 appear to describe procreation in the categories of ancient times, they seem unnecessarily extravagant if their sole purpose is to contrast natural and spiritual birth without making some reference to human inability in spiritual birth."¹²⁴ And further, "the form of 1.12f.—emphasis on human responsibility, followed by an accent on divine sovereignty which lays waste human pretensions—is found elsewhere in John (e.g. 6.40–45; 6.66–70)."¹²⁵ In short, "man's will," the realm in which faith is exercised, is not an impetus for the new birth.

Logical Sequence in John 1:12

Before moving to the demonstration that regeneration precedes faith in John 1:13, we must first deal with any sequence that may exist between verses 12 and 13. Two questions emerge: Who are the οἱ opening verse 13? And what is the significance of the aorist passive ἐγεννήθησαν closing verse 13? Three options emerge: (1) The "children of God" (τέκνα θεοῦ) of verse 12 is the sole antecedent of οἱ, and verse 13 is an extended appositive of τέκνα θεοῦ. This view demands the logical synonymy of τέκνα θεοῦ (adoption) and οἱ ἐγεννήθησαν (regeneration) and categorically rejects the logical priority of the latter.¹²⁶ It further concludes that since faith precedes "becoming children," it also precedes its synonym, "being born."¹²⁷ (2)

¹²³Morris, *John*, pp. 88–89; Ridderbos, *John*, pp. 47–48; Barrett, *John*, p. 164; Brooke F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John* (London: John Murray, 1908), pp. 17–18.

¹²⁴*Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), p. 182.

¹²⁵Ibid.

¹²⁶Barrett, for instance, argues from John's preference to use periphrastic participles to communicate passive pluperfective action, John 1:13 cannot convey pluperfective action (*John*, p. 164). Admittedly, John prefers this form, but he does not use it exclusively. He occasionally uses the pluperfective passive (John 11:44), finite aorist verbs (Rev 7:2; 12:13; 13:3) and the aorist participle (John 19:32) to express passive pluperfective action. To deny the possibility that the aorist ἐγεννήθησαν in John 1:13 conveys pluperfective action is not viable.

¹²⁷H. A. W. Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Hand-Book to the Gospel of John*, trans. William Urwick, rev. and ed. Frederick Crombie (reprint of 1883 ed., Winona Lake, IN: Alpha Publications, 1979), pp. 58–59; also Barrett, *John*, p. 164; apparently Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 3:95, 104; Erickson, *Christian Theology*, pp. 974–75.

The “children of God” (τέκνα θεοῦ) of verse 12 is the sole antecedent of οἱ, but the tense of ἐγεννήθησαν shows that the τέκνα θεοῦ were “born” logically prior to becoming “sons.” And (3) the antecedent of οἱ is the entirety of verse 12—those who have received Christ, been adopted, and continue to believe, but that there is no explicit priority of regeneration to any of these three actions.¹²⁸

Option (1) is grammatically plausible. However, in view of the previous discussion that bifurcates adoption and regeneration, this option is theologically untenable. Option (2) is also grammatically plausible, and satisfies the theological concerns raised above. However, the purpose of the passage does not seem to be the construction of an *ordo*. This leaves options (3) as the likeliest alternative.

Logical Sequence in John 1:13

While there is not logical priority expressed between John 1:12–13, two strands of evidence place regeneration prior to faith in John 1:13. The first has already been discussed, but perhaps merits recapitulation in the following syllogism:

A: No act of the human will can inaugurate regeneration.

B: Faith is an act of human will.

∴ C: Faith cannot inaugurate regeneration.

A second demonstration that regeneration precedes faith, however, is found in the verb ἐγεννήθησαν itself. Two features of this verb, the most common designation for regeneration in the NT,¹²⁹ yield evidence that regeneration is not a product of faith. The first of these is its passive voice. As Hoekema aptly points out, “The passive of the verb tells us that this is an occurrence in which human beings are wholly passive,”¹³⁰ precluding any human impetus to one’s own regeneration. A second feature of this verb that demonstrates its priority to faith is its lexical meaning itself. Hoekema continues his comments, “The very verb used, even apart from the passive voice, tells us the same thing. We did not choose to be born; we had nothing to do with our being born. We were completely passive in our natural birth. So it is with

¹²⁸Carson, *John*, p. 126; also his *Divine Sovereignty*, pp. 181–82; Ridderbos, *John*, pp. 46–47; Calvin, *Gospel According to St. John*, pp. 18–19; Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, pp. 132–33.

¹²⁹This verb is used some 16 times of the new birth in the Johannine writings (see McCabe, “Born of Water and the Spirit,” p. 89).

¹³⁰*Saved by Grace*, p. 97.

our spiritual birth.”¹³¹ As Carson notes:

It is true that no one is born from God who does not receive Christ and believe on his name; but it is equally true that no one receives Christ and believes on his name who is not born of God. Even though no causal relationship is made explicit, to read 1.12 without 1.13 is to obtain the impression that sonship is the *result* of faith. But it is possible to take 1.13 as a careful rejection of this view.... The evidence for the priority of the new birth in 1.12f is not conclusive, but it is very strong.¹³²

First John 5:1

Regeneration appears in 1 John 5:1 in the now familiar verb γεννᾶω, though this time it appears in the perfect tense, “is born” or “has been born.”¹³³ Faith is also conceded by all in the present participle ὁ πιστεύων, “he who believes.”¹³⁴ In short, debate surrounding

¹³¹Ibid.; cf. also Carson, *Divine Sovereignty*, p. 180. Admittedly, metaphors like this can be stretched unnaturally, but in view of John 3, where the purpose of the birth and wind metaphors seems to be precisely the passivity of the recipient of regeneration, Hoekema’s and Carson’s conclusions seem valid.

¹³²*Divine Sovereignty*, p. 182. See also Ridderbos, *John*, pp. 46–47.

¹³³The distinctions between these two meanings will be discussed below. For purposes of this paragraph it is sufficient to note that regeneration is, indeed, present.

¹³⁴Since the present tense, which emphasizes ongoing belief—he who *is continuing* to believe (see esp. Hiebert, *Epistles of John*, 224)—some have concluded that this is not a reference to saving faith, but to persevering faith (esp. Burdick, *Letters of John*, p. 342). If this is true, we would be forced to conclude that 1 John 5:1 contributes nothing to an *ordo salutis*. However, three factors militate against this conclusion.

First, while there is admittedly an emphasis on the continuing expression of the faith in 1 John 5:1 (see esp. the argument in Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, p. 621, n. 22, also Habakkuk 2:4 cf. Heb 10:38 and Romans 1:17), it is theologically impossible to divorce persevering faith from saving faith: they are the same faith in every way. Saving faith is persevering faith; persevering faith is saving faith. The faith of ὁ πιστεύων includes faith at any stage of the soteriological process, whether the initial expression of that faith or its continuing expression. This is born out by other Johannine uses of ὁ πιστεύων, many of which are clearly references to initial saving faith (e.g., John 3:15, 16, 36; 6:35; 11:25–27; 12:46).

Second is the much more explicit reference to initial, saving faith in 1 John 5:10. Here we find ὁ πιστεύων used in contrasting parallelism with its antonym, ὁ μὴ πιστεύων. The latter is defined as one who *has not* believed (perfect tense—οὐ πεπίστευκεν). It is logical to conclude, then, that ὁ πιστεύων, at least in verse 10, could likewise be defined as one who *has* believed (not *is believing*). There are no apparent grammatical indicators that suggest that John has shifted the meaning of this participle between 5:1 and 5:10.

Third, the content of the faith, the affirmation that “Jesus is the Christ,” is used elsewhere in Scripture as a creedal expression of initial, saving faith—an affirmation necessary for salvation (John 11:27; 20:31; Acts 8:37; Rom 10:9). There is no room in 1 John 5:1 for differentiating between two kinds of faith: it is persevering *and* saving faith.

this passage does not center around the presence or absence of regeneration.

Turning to the question of logical sequence in 1 John 5:1, we note with Donald Burdick that “this verse is not written to prove either the Calvinistic or the Arminian *ordo salutis*.”¹³⁵ Admittedly, the present argument was probably not filling John’s mind as he penned these words; however, it does not follow that he is indifferent toward the issue. Two factors, namely, the syntax and purpose for writing, militate against such a conclusion.

The Syntax of 1 John 5:1.

While A. E. Brookes concedes that John’s purpose in this verse is not specifically to prove an *ordo salutis*, he adds, “Incidentally, the tenses make it clear that the Divine Begetting is the antecedent, not the consequent of the believing.”¹³⁶ He comes to this conclusion from the syntactical combination of the present participle ὁ πιστεύων with the perfect γεγέννηται. The perfect tense, it is widely acknowledged, denotes (1) past action with (2) continuing results.¹³⁷ Greater stress, however, is often placed on one of these actions in any given usage of the perfect tense.¹³⁸ The verse may *emphasize* priority of birth (past action) or present possession of life (continuing results).¹³⁹ Since the believers addressed by John in this epistle were looking for a present assurance of salvation, it must be admitted that present possession of life dominates 1 John 5:1. However, dominance of the continuing result by no means excludes the suggestion of completed action¹⁴⁰—even

¹³⁵ *Letters of John the Apostle*, p. 358; also Hiebert, *Epistles of John*, p. 224; Brooke F. Westcott, *The Epistles of St. John*, 3rd ed. (reprint of 1892 ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), pp. 176–77; Marshall, *Epistles of St. John*, pp. 226–27; Raymond E. Brown, *The Epistles of John*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982), p. 535; A. E. Brooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Johannine Epistles*, International Critical Commentary (London: Scribner’s, 1912), p. 128.

¹³⁶ *Johannine Epistles*, p. 128; also Robert Law, *The Tests of Life: A Study of the First Epistle of St. John*, 3rd ed. (reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), p. 270; Stott, *Letters of John*, p. 175.

¹³⁷ Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, pp. 572–73, and all the grammars.

¹³⁸ Wallace calls this the “collapsed perfect” (ibid., p. 574).

¹³⁹ Or it may emphasize both equally. If both, then this is Wallace’s “normative perfect” (ibid., p. 574), the most common of the two uses of the perfect.

¹⁴⁰ As Wallace notes, “This use of the perfect does not exclude the notion of a completed act; rather, it *focuses* on the resultant state” (ibid., p. 575). Other grammars also emphasize that the usage of the perfect which excludes reference to past action is rare, with the exception of a few notable verbs (οἶδα, πέποιθα, μέμνημαι,

though one is *emphasized*, the other cannot be ignored.¹⁴¹ While the central purpose of this passage may not be to make an absolute statement of logical priority of regeneration, the usage of the perfect tense makes this conclusion unavoidable.¹⁴² As Robert Law summarizes, “The characteristic doctrine of the Epistle with regard to belief is unmistakable. Belief is the outcome, therefore the test, of life.... The tenses make it clear that...Christian Belief, which is essentially the spiritual recognition of spiritual truth, is a function of the Divine Life as imparted to men.”¹⁴³

The Purpose of 1 John

The purpose of 1 John is summed up in 5:13: certainty of the present possession of life that will ultimately issue in the resurrection life of the eschaton,¹⁴⁴ that is, certainty that regeneration has taken place. Simplistically, John’s first epistle is an exposition of the trademark *evidences that accompany* new birth and mark a truly regenerate man: the “tests of life.”¹⁴⁵ They are evidences that regeneration *has occurred*: mutual fellowship with God and believers (1:6–7); keeping God’s

ἔσθηκα, τέθνηκα). Γεννάω is never listed among these exceptions (ibid., pp. 578–80; Curtis Vaughan, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament* [Nashville: Broadman, 1979], p. 150; Ernest DeWitt Burton, *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek* [reprint of 1900 ed., Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1976], p. 37). In keeping with this understanding, there are no grammatical clues that suggest excluding the idea of completed action for γηγεννηται in 1 John 5:1.

¹⁴¹The NIV, for instance, alternates between the past action and the continuing result in its translation of the term in 1 John (2:29, 4:7 cf. 3:9, 5:1). See esp. the argument in James F. White, *The Potter’s Freedom* (Amittyville, NY: Calvary Press, 2000), pp. 287–88.

¹⁴²In no way can Demarest’s unqualified assertion, that 1 John 5:1 is a text proving the priority of faith to regeneration, be maintained (*Integrative Theology*, 3:95; also Demarest, *Cross and Salvation*, p. 41 cf. p. 264. Ironically, Demarest maintains the English translation “has been saved” for the verb all the while stressing the opposite conclusion.). While Wallace does describe a rare “proleptic perfect” that could yield this understanding, he affirms that this “rare form...occurs in the apodosis of a conditional clause, and depends on the time of the verb in the protasis” (*Greek Grammar*, p. 581). Since this verse contains no conditional clause, this meaning is excluded.

¹⁴³*The Tests of Life*, p. 270.

¹⁴⁴That is, “life ha[ving] the seeds of eternity within it” (*NIDNTT*, s.v. “Life,” p. 482); or “a ζωή which has an eternal future” (*TDNT*, “ζάω,” p. 870).

¹⁴⁵Hence the title of Law’s commentary. Even Ryrie comments, “The new nature will bear fruit in a new life. In passages such as 1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18 the abiding results of regeneration are doing righteousness, not committing sin, loving one another, believing that Jesus is the Christ, and overcoming the world” (*Holy Spirit*, p. 92).

commandments (2:3; 3:24); loving fellow-believers (2:10; 4:7); hating the world (2:15); perseverance in doctrine and fellowship (2:19); practicing righteousness (2:29); continued resistance to habitual sin (3:9; 5:18); continued ministration of the Holy Spirit (3:24; 4:13–15; 5:10); and here in 1 John 5:1, *faith*. Concluding with Law: “The Epistle nowhere proposes to test Belief by its fruits in good works.... Belief, Righteousness, and Love are concomitantly tests of having Eternal Life.”¹⁴⁶ The logical priority of regeneration to faith is strongly maintained in 1 John 5:1.

A Passage Whose Theological Emphasis Demands the Priority of Regeneration

1 Corinthians 2:14—The man without the Spirit¹⁴⁷ does not embrace the things of the Spirit of God: they are foolishness to him. He cannot appreciate them: they are evaluated by means of the Spirit.

The argument that regeneration precedes faith derived from this verse is more theological than grammatical. While neither regeneration nor faith are mentioned by name in this verse, the verse nonetheless stands as one of the Bible’s clearest expressions of the need for a new nature (regeneration) in order for a person to produce a valid expression of saving faith.

Faith in 1 Corinthians 2:14

Paul references faith in 1 Corinthians 2:14 in at least two, and perhaps all three of the Greek verbs employed. Δέχεται, “to embrace,”¹⁴⁸ and γινώσκω, “to appreciate,”¹⁴⁹ are easy to identify as such,

¹⁴⁶*Tests of Life*, p. 270, n. 1. Also, as Raymond E. Brown notes, “All the other I John statements (2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:18) relate the divine begetting to the Christian’s behavior (acting justly, not sinning, and loving)—an indication that belief and behavior are two aspects of the same struggle in I John” (*Epistles of John*, p. 535).

¹⁴⁷The term ψυχικός is difficult to translate. It means, literally, “soulish,” but from the context it is clearly antonymous with the “man who has received the Spirit” (v. 12; cf. also Jude 19). Hence the translation “the man without the Spirit” (so also the NIV). This will be further discussed below.

¹⁴⁸For this definition and the next I am indebted to Daniel Fuller, “The Holy Spirit’s Role in Biblical Interpretation,” in *Scripture, Tradition, and Interpretation*, ed. W. Ward Gasque and William S. LaSor (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), pp. 190–91. This meaning for δέχομαι is also well-attested lexically (BDAG, p. 221) and in the commentaries (Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1958], p. 60; Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987], p. 116; Charles Hodge, *1 Corinthians* [reprint of 1857 ed., Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1958], p. 43).

and one might also add ἀνακρίνω, “to evaluate,” to this list, as the context seems to denote correct evaluation that results in approval.¹⁵⁰ Thus this passage is not addressing the intellectual deficiency of the unbeliever, but his volitional deficiency. A man without the Spirit *will not believe*.¹⁵¹

With the introduction of a second class of believers, “carnal Christians,” the early Dallas School muddies the water. For these, the “things of the Spirit of God” (τὰ τῷ πνεύματος τῷ θεοῦ) are not simply the truths necessary to salvation, but “deep things” of the Spirit (cf. 2:10).¹⁵² As such, these “things” are identified with the “meat” of 1 Corinthians 3:2, “deeper” truths that are unavailable not only to unbelievers, but to “carnal”¹⁵³ believers as well.¹⁵⁴ This view finds no support among the commentaries. Instead, τὰ τῷ πνεύματος τῷ θεῷ are regularly regarded as those basic scriptural truths given by special revelation to Paul and the other NT prophets (v. 13) that make one wise unto salvation (v. 5).¹⁵⁵ Further supporting this claim is the only other usage of the phrase, in Romans 8:5, where the context clearly identifies these “things” as general, spiritual truths possessed univer-

¹⁴⁹This understanding is not accepted by all. Some view this as a purely intellectual deficiency (Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 117), others as a combination of intellectual and volitional deficiencies (Hodge, *1 Corinthians*, pp. 43–44; Morris, *First Corinthians*, p. 60). Fuller’s argument that one must have “understanding” in order to critically evaluate something as “foolishness,” however, seems sound (“Holy Spirit’s Role,” pp. 189–98; also Robert H. Stein’s in *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994], p. 67). The word thus denotes more than mere intellectual apprehension, for unbelievers possess this; instead it is an experiential knowledge and appreciation (*TDNT*, s.v. “γινώσκω,” 1:690; Donald W. Burdick, “Οἶδα and Γινώσκω in the Pauline Epistles,” in *New Dimensions in New Testament Study*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker and Merrill C. Tenney [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974], p. 356), or an embrasure of truth as truth (*TDNT*, s.v. “γινώσκω,” 1:690–92; also BDAG, pp. 161–62, def. 7).

¹⁵⁰Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 117.

¹⁵¹Even if the strictly intellectual idea is retained, however, the argument still stands; in fact, it is made even stronger, for a man cannot possibly exercise faith in facts that he does not comprehend.

¹⁵²Lewis S. Chafer, *He That Is Spiritual*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1967), p. 17; Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, p. 18.

¹⁵³That is, believers who do not grow, but remain infantile in their faith.

¹⁵⁴Charles C. Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible: New American Standard Bible 1995 Update*, expanded ed., Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), p. 1820, n. on 2:15 and 3:1; Chafer, *He That Is Spiritual*, pp. 15–22; *Systematic Theology*, 1:111–13.

¹⁵⁵E.g., Anthony C. Thistelton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), p. 270; Fee, *1 Corinthians*, pp. 115–17.

sally by all who have been converted, who are indwelt (vv. 9–11), who are children of God (vv. 14–17), and who are classified as spiritually alive (vv. 6, 10–11, 13).¹⁵⁶ There is no room in Romans 8 for a third category of “carnal” believers or a second tier of spiritual truths available only to the elite believer.¹⁵⁷ There are two mutually exclusive categories of people described in 1 Corinthians 2 and 3: people who have the Spirit and people who do not have the Spirit; people who can exercise faith and people who cannot.

Regeneration in 1 Corinthians 2:14

Following the above paragraph, 1 Corinthians 2:14 strictly describes people who do not have the Spirit. The question thus arises: what work of the Holy Spirit is lacking? Does the unbeliever simply need a non-regenerative form of illumination (which would support faith preceding regeneration) or does he need regeneration itself (which would demand regeneration preceding faith) to overcome his deficiency? Stated succinctly, can one who is classified as ψυχικός be illumined without being regenerated?

The theory that one can be illumined without being regenerated is an argument from silence: the specific terms “new birth,” “born,” “made alive,” etc., are absent. However, in the face of their predisposition to see faith prior to regeneration, at least two theologians have opted for this understanding. Millard Erickson likens illumination to “the prevenient grace of which Arminians speak,” differing only in that illumination “is bestowed only upon the elect, not upon all humans, and it leads infallibly or efficaciously to a positive response by the recipient.”¹⁵⁸ However, he is inconsistent, elsewhere describing the illumination of 1 Corinthians 2:14 as “a one-time work of the Spirit—regeneration.”¹⁵⁹ Lewis and Demarest are likewise inconsistent. While twice they identify 1 Corinthians 2:14 as an example of illumination apart from regeneration,¹⁶⁰ they five times deny that sinners participate in this illuminating work,¹⁶¹ and once describe this illumi-

¹⁵⁶See esp. Moo, *Romans*, pp. 486–87.

¹⁵⁷See B. B. Warfield, review of *He That Is Spiritual*, by Lewis S. Chafer, in *Princeton Theological Review* 17 (April 1919): 322–27; Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, pp. 20–27.

¹⁵⁸*Christian Theology*, p. 44.

¹⁵⁹*Ibid.*, p. 275.

¹⁶⁰*Integrative Theology*, 1:168, 3:55.

¹⁶¹*Ibid.*, 1:144; 2:203; 3:37, 60, 150.

nation as an “effect of Spirit-regeneration.”¹⁶²

The tension point is obvious in both cases. Both works seek to defend the total inability of the unregenerate man. Both apparently realize that for the unregenerate man to be illumined apart from a systemic change of nature presents a serious theological enigma. For sake of illustration note the following argument. Demarest forcibly maintains that since

their wills are predisposed to sinful choices and actions...the unconverted need to be made entirely new in order to know, love, and serve the Creator.... Regeneration is that work of the Spirit at conversion that renews the heart and life, thus restoring the person's intellectual, volitional, moral, emotional, and relational capacities to know, love, and serve God.¹⁶³

Clearly, Demarest denies that unregenerate man can know (intellectual capacity), love (emotional capacity), or choose (volitional capacity) God—he is beset by total inability. Yet, unbelievably, he can exercise faith (which surely includes knowledge, assent, and choice) to obtain regeneration. How is this possible? This author can discern but two options, both equally troubling: (1) the unregenerate man blindly chooses contrary to his nature, or (2) his nature is not so depraved after all. Since both Demarest and Erickson are loathe to embrace either of these options, they are content to tolerate the inconsistency.

In summary, this author could find no *consistent* voice among the evangelical theologies or commentaries that maintains that the unregenerate can be recipients of the illumination in 1 Corinthians 2:14.¹⁶⁴

This leaves only one other alternative, namely, that the illumination of 1 Corinthians 2:14 is regeneration or an aspect of regeneration.¹⁶⁵ This alternative, the majority view, is ideal. It recognizes that unregenerate man is darkened in his understanding (Eph 4:17), hostile to God (Rom 8:7), incapable of pleasing or trusting God (Rom 8:7–8), and dead (Eph 2:1–5; Col 2:13). This is his *nature*, and he always discerns, evaluates, and chooses in keeping with this *nature*. The only

¹⁶²Ibid., 3:93.

¹⁶³*Cross and Salvation*, pp. 293–94.

¹⁶⁴Even the Dallas School has uniformly rejected this understanding (note, e.g., Ryrie's statement concerning illumination in 1 Corinthians 2: “Unbelievers...cannot experience this ministry” [*Basic Theology*, p. 116]).

¹⁶⁵McCune's succinct definition of *illumination* as the “regeneration of the mind” (“Systematic Theology I” [class notes, Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, Fall 2000], p. 31) can scarcely be improved. Ironically, Millard Erickson's comment on p. 275 of his *Christian Theology* (see n. 159) concurs. This is also the author's preference.

satisfactory solution to this condition is for him to be given a new *nature* and become a spiritual man, a man with the indwelling Spirit—he must be regenerated.

We conclude that the message of 1 Corinthians 2:14 is that an unregenerate man is incapable of knowing, accepting, or believing the great soteriological truths of Scripture. And one can surely never exercise saving faith in that which he cannot know, accept, or believe. 1 Corinthians 2:14 supplies certain proof that regeneration precedes faith.

A THEOLOGICAL SYNTHESIS

In the exegetical sections preceding, several theological points have been raised that, together, produce the strongest argument for the priority of regeneration to saving faith. This section synthesizes these theological points into a single, coherent argument.

Spiritual Death

The unregenerate man is regularly characterized in Scripture as “dead,” that is, “separated from the life of God” (Eph 2:1–3; 4:17–20). His life is described in terms of futility, ignorance, darkness, and depravity—a state in which no one can “learn Christ” (Eph 4:17–20).¹⁶⁶ The primary result of this “deadness” of heart is the unregenerate man’s inability to believe, see, hear, understand, or turn in repentance (Isa 6:10; John 12:39–40). With this in view, it is difficult to identify how “illumination” or the “efficacious call” could benefit the unbeliever without first remedying his deadness. Nonetheless, two theologians have offered answers.¹⁶⁷

The Conception/Birth Solution

Lewis and Demarest offer the following description of the non-regenerative work of illumination: “The Spirit also works supernaturally or by a direct influence, renewing the sinner’s capacities to know, love, and act upon spiritual things. The Spirit graciously enables the sinner’s *mind* to apprehend the good, her *desires* to love the good, and her *will* to do the good...by an initial *renewing of the depraved mind, desires, and wills*.”¹⁶⁸ Obvious questions emerge from this de-

¹⁶⁶Note a brief article by James A. Hyde, “Ephesians 4:17–24,” *Review and Expositor* 89 (Summer 1992): 403–407, for a descriptive analysis of “alienation.”

¹⁶⁷Neither Ryrie, Chafer, nor Erickson addresses the enigma.

¹⁶⁸*Integrative Theology*, 3:54–55.

scription: What vestige of death still persists in such a person? If the mind, will, and affections have been activated, what part of man remains “dead”? What additional benefits could be added that are not already possessed in illumination? What need is there for regeneration?

The answer for Lewis and Demarest is that calling and conversion are two components of “spiritual conception...preced[ing] the spiritual birth of the child of God.”¹⁶⁹ Note the following explanation:

Let us develop the biblical analogy of conception and birth further. The Spirit’s effectual call provides the fertile ground for the initial sowing of the seed of God’s revealed truth. Those who conceive—as indicated by belief in the Gospel, repentance, and faith in Christ—are then reborn or regenerated.¹⁷⁰

The weaknesses are obvious: (1) this “development” of the conception/birth analogy finds no credible support in Scripture, and (2) the analogy can only provide a valid solution if one concedes that life begins at birth rather than at conception, which Scripture clearly denies.¹⁷¹

The Limited Life/Full Life Solution

John Walvoord’s description of the non-regenerative illuminating activity of the Holy Spirit differs little from the one offered by Lewis and Demarest, above; in fact, the benefits are even broader. His strict definition of this work is “the instantaneous work of God empowering the human will and inclining the human heart to faith in Christ.”¹⁷² However, he expands his understanding by citing favorably the following excerpt from the *Westminster Confession*:

All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, He is pleased, in His appointed time, effectually to call, by His Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature to grace and salvation, by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God, taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them an heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and, by His almighty power, determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ: yet so, as they come most freely, being made willing by His grace.

This effectual call is of God’s free and special grace alone, not from

¹⁶⁹Ibid., 3:104.

¹⁷⁰Ibid., 3:57.

¹⁷¹This position is untenable in view of such passages as Ps 51:5; 139:13–16; and esp. Exod 21:22–25.

¹⁷²*Holy Spirit*, p. 122.

anything at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive therein, until, being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it.¹⁷³

He also cites the following from A. H. Strong:

The operation of God is the originating cause of that new disposition of the affections, and that new activity of the will, by which the sinner accepts Christ. The cause is not in the response of the will to the presentation of motives by God, nor any mere cooperation of the will of man with the will of God, but is an almighty act of God in the will of man, by which its freedom to choose God as its end is restored and rightly exercised.¹⁷⁴

Again the obvious question is how the mind, will, and affections of a man can be thus restored while the individual is still dead. What remains dead?

Walvoord's solution is incongruous. At Walvoord's efficacious call, "in a moment the soul passes from a state of spiritual death to spiritual life"¹⁷⁵ (a laudable explanation). However, as we read further in the volume, we find that the life imparted at the efficacious call is not regeneration life. The individual must believe to receive regeneration life, or "eternal life."¹⁷⁶ To summarize Walvoord's position, the individual receives new life *twice*, once as an unbeliever then later as a believer. While Walvoord thus solves the problem of spiritual deadness, he provides an enigmatic two-stage impartation of life that is difficult to fathom, let alone support scripturally.

The Regeneration Solution

A far more theologically satisfying solution is that spiritual deadness is not mediated through an independent, non-regenerative, illuminating work at all. Instead, regeneration is that which renders the call efficacious. The two are logically simultaneous. Ephesians supports

¹⁷³p. 122; taken from the *Westminster Confession*, X.1, 2.

¹⁷⁴p. 123; taken from Strong's *Systematic Theology*, pp. 792–93.

¹⁷⁵*Holy Spirit*, p. 122.

¹⁷⁶*Ibid.*, p. 128. The reader may no doubt wonder at this point whether I have unduly wrested Walvoord's understanding. To allay this doubt, please note the following answer Walvoord supplied by email to the author in response to a query about this enigma: "The difference between life before the second birth and life after is that the believer has a new nature and is now justified by faith. As I have indicated, the believer is made alive in the new birth at the moment of faith. The Bible does not explain some of these things and you have to do it from the standpoint of logic and cause and effect" (2 March 2001).

this remedy for spiritual deadness using the simple terms “made alive” (2:5) and donning the newly created self, the new man (4:22–24), clearly synonyms for regeneration.

The Old Nature/New Nature

While discussing 1 Corinthians 2:14 above, it was demonstrated that there are two classes of people: those with the Spirit (πνευματικός) and those without the Spirit (ψυχικός). It was also shown that to be “spiritual” cannot mean possession of the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit in isolation from regeneration and the new nature. This being the case, the question those holding to faith preceding regeneration must answer is this: Is the illumined but unregenerate man πνευματικός or ψυχικός? Does he have the new nature or just the old nature?

If the former is selected, we are left with the same theological problem seen in the last section. This individual has the new nature, that is, the “complex of attributes”¹⁷⁷ which render him capable of serving God and acting righteously¹⁷⁸—what more can be added through regeneration? If, on the other hand, he has just the old nature,¹⁷⁹ that is, “a continuing tendency to rebel against God,”¹⁸⁰ how is it that he is able to act contrary to his nature? Again, two answers have emerged.

Illumination as Extraordinary Coercion

For Lewis Sperry Chafer, the solution is to describe the non-regenerative, efficacious work as “an ability to understand the gospel, which ability is augmented beyond that which is the natural competency of the individual thus blessed.”¹⁸¹ With it, “the otherwise blinded mind is at once more than normally enabled to understand the three

¹⁷⁷See Charles R. Smith, “Two Natures—Or One? An Attempt at Theological Clarification,” *Voice* 62 (July–August 1983): 20; J. Oliver Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols. in 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962, 1963), 2:52; William W. Combs, “Does the Believer Have One Nature or Two?” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 2 (Fall 1997): 83–86.

¹⁷⁸Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 3:196.

¹⁷⁹This is the uniform understanding of all the major proponents of faith preceding regeneration.

¹⁸⁰Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, p. 214; cf. also Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 3:196.

¹⁸¹*Systematic Theology*, 6:223.

great foundational truths [sin, righteousness and judgment].”¹⁸² Erickson describes the same work as “an extraordinary presentation of the message of salvation. It is sufficiently powerful to counteract the effects of sin and enable the person to believe. It is also so appealing that the person will believe.”¹⁸³

In short, the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit is so powerful that it effectively counters the effects of the old nature and allows the unbeliever to choose *contrary to his nature*. Thus, the old man is either (1) less than totally depraved and able to respond in faith through an “extraordinary presentation of the message of salvation,” or (2) coerced to act contrary to his will. These are the only two logical conclusions to this argument, though neither author embraces either. Both options are theologically unacceptable.

Illumination as Proxy Faith

A troubling second option emerges in some discussions of Romans 8:10. In this passage we read that “if Christ is in you, though your body is dead because of sin, the S/spirit is life/alive because of righteousness.” Most modern commentators have opted for the translation “the [Holy] Spirit is life,” in this passage, but qualify in their comments that it is the Holy Spirit as *source* of life that is being described.¹⁸⁴ Robert T. Fortna, however, suggests that the life we receive at salvation is not technically our own. After discussing the role of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 2:14, Fortna proposes the following paraphrase of Romans 8:10: “If Christ is in you, although your body (that is all of you, including your spirit) is dead because of sin, so that you have no life, no spirit, of your own, the Spirit of God, of Christ, is *life for you*,” adding, “Our life, the body and the breath of it, is of itself dead. But God gives us his very life, breathes his Spirit into us.”¹⁸⁵

Again, I risk misrepresenting Fortna’s position and admit that his comments do not function as a defense of the priority of faith to regeneration; however, the logical inference of this remark is that it is not the unbeliever who actually exercises faith, but alien or proxy

¹⁸²Ibid., 3:222.

¹⁸³*Christian Theology*, p. 944.

¹⁸⁴Moo, *Romans*, p. 492; Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:390; Barrett, *Romans*, p. 159; Dunn, *Romans*, 1:432–33; Schreiner, *Romans*, p. 415.

¹⁸⁵Robert T. Fortna, “Romans 8:10 and Paul’s Doctrine of the Spirit,” *Anglican Theological Review* 41 (April 1959), p. 83; see also the favorable citation in Robert A. Pyne, “The Resurrection as Restoration: A Thematic Study of Paul’s Theology,” (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1990), p. 306.

life from the Spirit acting on his behalf. The human nature remains spiritually dead, but the Spirit steps in as life “for the believer.” If this is true, then this unbeliever has not exercised faith at all. “Faith” is reduced to a vicarious act forced upon a defiant will. This solution cannot work.

Illumination as Regeneration

The only solution that survives theological scrutiny is that illumination is the regeneration of the mind, and, as such, that regeneration and illumination occur simultaneously.

Summary of the Theological Synthesis

While an exegetical case for the priority faith to regeneration, the theological argument conclusively demands that regeneration precedes faith. All theological attempts to maintain the contrary have resulted in dubious, and even theologically dangerous conclusions.

CONCLUSION

The placement of faith logically prior to regeneration within the *ordo salutis* has been a prominent if not dominant position among evangelicals since the inception of fundamentalism. And, admittedly, a surface reading of some texts lends to this conclusion. However, as this article has demonstrated, other conclusions emerge from our quest for exegetical options for these and other texts.

But, more importantly, this article has sought to demonstrate that proponents of the priority of faith to regeneration have provided no consistent, defensible answer to the theological inconsistencies on the topics of spiritual deadness and the new nature. As such, their exegetical position, while formidable, stands incomplete.

In view of these two strands of evidence, placing regeneration logically prior to saving faith emerges as the better solution in establishing a theologically consistent *ordo salutis*.